EFL Teachers' Critical Consciousness: The Role of Gender, Age, Academic Degree, Teaching Experience and Workplace

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Abstract

The study investigated EFL teachers' current level of critical consciousness as well as their beliefs about the educational context where they taught. The study also explored how gender, teaching experience, workplace, and academic degree differentiated the participants with regard to their critical consciousness. Drawing upon the related literature and the existing questionnaires in the field, we designed and validated a questionnaire applying technical statistical procedures (e.g., confirmatory factor analysis). The questionnaire was then completed by 310 English teachers teaching in different language institutions across the country. The findings revealed that, in general, EFL teachers' current level of critical consciousness was above average. However, they believed that the educational context did not encourage and cultivate in them critical consciousness. It was also found that, contrary to expectations, the academic degree did not differentiate teachers in this regard. Moreover, male and female teachers were found not to be significantly different in their critical consciousness. The theoretical and pedagogical implications are discussed in the paper.

Keywords: Critical Consciousness, Gender, Age, Academic Degree, EFL Teachers, Workplace

1. Introduction

1.1. Background and Theoretical Framework

A cursory look at the literature on Applied Linguistics in general and TESOL (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages) in particular shows that the field has mainly focused on the cognitive and linguistic aspects of second language education in its relatively short history, neglecting, to a great extent, the social and political dimensions inherent in practicing it (Abednia, 2012, Crookes & Lehner, 1998). This orientation towards SL (Second Language) education was mainly driven by the structuralist views on language considering language as a rule-governed value-free system of interconnected elements as well as the behavioristic approach to learning which viewed language learning as the formation of new habits in highly controlled conditions detached from its real-world context of use. In other words, there was, and in some places, still is an instrumentalist and positivist orientation towards language wherein language is considered as 'an objective system that can more or less be described by the theorists and transmitted by the practitioners, and teaching becomes a technical process prescribed by the experts and implemented by the teachers' (Penycook, 1990, p. 303). However, this asocial and apolitical stance towards language education has been challenged and criticized most recently as language educators developed an interest in sociocultural views of learning and critical theories (Benesch, 2009; Conagarajah, 2005; Hawkins & Norton, 2009; Kumaravadivelu, 2003; Pennycook, 2001).

Second Language Teacher Education (SLTE), as a sub-discipline of Applied Linguistics, also followed the predominant orientation towards language learning of the period from the time it was formed in the 1960s. In its early days, SLTE was mainly concerned with practical issues; therefore, training programs were designed to provide prospective teachers with practical

classroom skills required to teach the new methods such as audiolingualism (Burns & Richards, 2009). These programs viewed teachers' task as the application of theory to practice, passively learning externally determined and prescribed techniques and principles (Freeman, 2001; Richards, 2008). In other words, language teachers were regarded, for a long time, as technicians who had to only implement a suitable methodology for language learners to acquire the second or foreign language (Varghese, Morgan, Johnston & Johnson, 2005).

However, as more classroom-based research was undertaken, it became apparent that classrooms were such complex sites that one-size-fits-all cause-effect modes of teaching methodologies were not able to adequately address them. As a result, the scope of SLTE soon expanded, and the focus shifted from the emphasis on knowledge and skills to include the development of individual teachers and examination of professional learning processes (Freeman, 2009). This focus on the nature of teacher learning thus caused the content and delivery of teacher education courses to change. Therefore, the social and situated nature of teacher learning came into the forefront (Lave & Wenger, 1991), stating that learning occurs through the participants' interaction in the context. In other words, as Burns and Richards (2009, p. 4) state, 'teacher learning is not viewed as translating knowledge and theories into practice but rather as constructing new knowledge and theory through participating in specific social contexts and engaging in particular types of activities and processes.'

The movement towards the constructivist and critical approaches to teacher education does not approve of the traditional view considering teachers as consumers of knowledge who practice others' theories; instead, it views teachers as active participants who can theorize what they practice and practice their own theories (Kumaravadivelu, 2003). Thus, teachers are believed to bring with themselves prior teaching experiences and personal beliefs and theories, which, to a great extent, determine their classroom behavior and action (Freeman &

Johnson, 1998). This movement led to the growth of teacher cognition which is concerned with 'unobservable dimension of teaching — teachers' mental lives' (Borg, 2009, p. 163) with the realization that it is not possible to fully understand teachers without knowing their beliefs, knowledge and thoughts affecting their classroom practices. Nevertheless, as mentioned by Bartolomé and Balderrama (2001), the beliefs and values of teachers are viewed mostly as neutral and apolitical in the literature rather than being considered as ideologically oriented.

The sociocultural and constructivist approaches to teacher learning and education have also resulted in a surge of interest in teacher professional identity especially since around the turn of the new millennium, positing that teacher development is mainly a process of reshaping or constructing professional identity (Varghese et al., 2005). Moreover, it is believed that the most influential and perceptible paradigms that have challenged the traditional approaches to language, teaching, and learning are sociocultural and critical views (Hawkins & Norton, 2009). Thus, as mentioned, the field has experienced an epistemological shift from the traditional cognitivist perspectives to language education in general, and teacher education or development in particular, to critical and sociocultural perspectives (Miller, 2009). That is to say, in investigating teacher identity, such issues as agency and power cannot be now neglected and, as Miller (2009) notes, a critical dimension with sociological underpinnings has increasingly been added to the socioculctural facet. As a result, concepts such as critical pedagogy (CP) and critical consciousness (CC) as its underlying principle secured a place in second language teacher education so that teachers are now given a voice and are empowered to fight for more equal and democratic education.

The importance of achieving or developing CC is increasingly recognized in teacher education (Comeau, 2008). CC, or in Freire ' s (1973) term conscientization (translation of the Portuguese term conscientização), is a

concept developed by the Brazilian educator Paulo Freire (1973). Grounded primarily in post‐Marxist critical theory, CC emphasizes the development of an in‐depth understanding of the world, allowing teachers to grow awareness of the world and its social realities, and to become conscious of their position in the society (McDonough, 2015). According to Dozier, Johnson, and Rogers (2006), CP, the application of CC in pedagogy, aims at providing students and teachers with more equitable experiences, and empowering them, as social agents, to critique the status quo of the field. Comber (2001) holds that critical literacy enables teachers and students to enquire about 'language and power, about people and lifestyle, about morality and ethics, about who is advantaged by the way things are and who is disadvantaged' (p. 271).

At first, Freire (1973) focused on the role of CC in demonstrating the unequal and even violent relationship existing between the oppressed and the oppressor. However, later, he shifted the focus of the construct to regard it more as a dialectical way of knowing with the aim of transformation (Willis et al., 2008). According to McDonough (2009),

> definitions of critical consciousness center on key concepts of identity reflection, analysis of power, and inquiry about assumptions. These concepts include the social process of questioning one's assumptions about reality, active participation in the critique of knowledge, and gaining the means to understanding domination and its modalities. Engagement with critical consciousness involves consideration of power in many forms and multiple conceptions of identity (p. 529).

One can develop CC by learning some skills to critique the structure of school and society. In fact, it is a tool for fighting against unfair social structures (Gatimu, 2009). A CC framework empowers individuals to be involved in the struggles of modern times for the purpose of social and cultural transformation. It is a 'tool for exploring issues of subjectivity and identities as social actors

struggling with multiple and conflicting experiences shaped by changing relationships between the public and private, the local and the global, structure and movement, self and other' (Gatimu, 2009, p. 49). Botelho and Gibson-Gates (2008) assert that 'critical inquiry requires that teacher candidates unlearn and learn new ways of learning, teaching, and researching' (p. 21).

Generally, the field of ELT was not quite open to and receptive of critical approaches. They, in fact, entered the field rather belatedly compared with other similar disciplines (Conagarajah, 2005). Although significant advances have been made in their theorizations, genuine empirical studies are still relatively scarce in this respect. Given this, some empirical studies are to be reviewed in the succeeding paragraphs.

For one, Cox and Assis-Peterson (1999) investigated teachers' awareness of CP in ELT in the context of Brazil. Using the interview as their main instrument, they attempted to discover how Brazilian teachers viewed CP, how they viewed themselves politically as English teachers, and what their approach to teaching English was. To this end, they interviewed (in Portuguese) 40 English teachers, including six university professors, 12 teachers at private institutions, and 22 teachers at elementary schools. The results revealed that, when asked to reflect on their teaching approach, 30 out of 40 teachers believed that they used a communicative approach, while five teachers regarded their approaches as linguistic ones. Only did five teachers report that they had adopted a critical discursive approach. Surprisingly, most of the teachers interviewed (35 of them) mentioned that they had never heard about CP. It is worth noting that only two out of five teachers who claimed to have used CP, had the true interpretation of the term.

In another study, Hollstein (2006) investigated how American pre-service teachers conceptualized and implemented CP, using questionnaire and interview. From the 34 participants who filled the questionnaire, ten teachers

were selected for the interview, who were split into two groups of five teachers, with one group showing a sophisticated definition of CP based on the results of the questionnaire, while the other group was lacking the ability to define CP. The participants were also required to develop a lesson plan based on the premises of CP. The results indicated that all the participants were unable to define and implement CP properly and that more research needed to be done to correct pre-service teachers' misconceptions of CP. Likewise, investigating elementary school teachers' attitudes towards CP, Yilmaz (2009) found that teachers partially agreed with the principles of CP. The findings also revealed that educational background, professional experience and the place they taught significantly differentiated teachers with respect to their perceptions of CP while gender did not.

In another study in the context of the present study (i.e., in the EFL context of Iran), Soodmand Afshar and Donyaie (2019) investigated the Iranian EFL teachers' perception of CP, focusing specifically on the possible effects of such demographic information as gender, language teaching experience, and academic degree on CP perception. One hundred and eighty-one EFL teachers including 66 university professors, 51 school teachers and 64 teachers at private language schools completed a questionnaire on CP. Ten teachers from each group were also observed using a checklist. The results obtained indicated that the three groups of the teachers in the study had significantly different perceptions of CP. Although gender and teaching experience were found not to differentiate teachers in terms of their CP perception, the academic degree was found to do so significantly. Finally, the results also revealed a significant difference between teachers' reported perception of CP and their observed classroom practices of the concept, which again shows a discrepancy between teachers' beliefs and their actual classroom practices. Of course, this discrepancy can, to a great extent, be attributed to teachers' being required to follow a certain

pre-determined and imposed set of standards even when they are contrary to their beliefs. Similarly, Aliakbari and Allahmoradi (2012) investigated Iranian school teachers' perceptions of CP considering their age, gender, and the level they taught. However, contrary to the findings obtained by Soodmand Afshar and Donyaie (2019) just discussed, they found a significant difference among teachers in their perceptions of CP based on their gender; however, no significant difference was observed based on age and the level they taught. It can be seen that the gender factor in this regard yields conflicting results and thus needs to be investigated further. In a similar vein, Atai and Moradi (2016) revealed that Iranian EFL teachers were generally supportive of the tenets of CP. Moreover, the level of education and the field of expertise were found not to significantly differentiate teachers in terms of their views of CP.

1.2. Significance of the Study and Research Questions

The study aimed at developing a questionnaire to investigate the critical consciousness of EFL/ESL teachers. Thus, the very introduction of this new inventory, which, to the best of our knowledge and exploration, did not exist previously might have some contribution to the field. Browsing the first two editions of the Handbook of Research on Teacher Education, McDonough (2015) found that critical consciousness was not found in the index of teacher education literature, highlighting most possibly the fact that the concept was new to the field. The present study was thus designed to investigate the CC of Iranian EFL teachers and to see whether such individual factors as age, gender, academic degree, and teaching experience had any impact on their CC. The following research questions were thus formulated for the present study.
1. What are Iranian EFL teachers' current level of CC?
2. What are Iranian EFL teachers' beliefs on the role of the educational system in creating CC?

3. What are Iranian EFL teachers' beliefs on the actions to be taken to boost CC?

4. Do age, teaching experience, gender, academic degree, and workplace differentiate Iranian EFL teachers with regard to their CC?

2. Methodology

2.1. Participants

The participants of the study included Iranian EFL teachers teaching in private language institutes, high schools, and universities who, in total, comprised 310 participants, including 104 males (33.5 percent of the participants) and 206 females (66.5 percent). The participants were also divided into three groups of B.A., M.A. and Ph.D. teachers with a frequency of 126, 151, and 33 (approximately 40, 49, and 11 percent) respectively. It is also worth mentioning that out of the 310 participants, 52 teachers were teaching at university, 126 at school and 132 at private foreign language institutes. Attempts were made to include those teachers who held at least a Bachelor's degree in one of the branches of English language namely, English Translation, English Literature and Teaching English as a Foreign Language, most of whom had already taken and passed a systematic Teacher Training Course. The majority of the participants were, of course, graduates of English Language Teaching. Also, the data were collected from teachers teaching in different cities throughout the country to make the study nation-wide and to improve the generalizability of the findings in this regard.

The participants of the study were selected based on convenience and purposive sampling procedures. It should be noted that the participants took part in the study on a voluntary basis. That is, if any of them did not intend to

participate in the study for any reason, they were thanked and assured that their job condition would not be affected by their non-attendance in the study.

2.2. Instrumentation and Data Collection Procedure

Although there were some inventories available in the literature to assess CC (e.g., McWhirter & McWhirter, 2016; Thomas et al., 2014), we found the need to design a new inventory for some reasons. First, the existing questionnaires were designed mostly to assess the learners' and adolescents' CC, while in the present study the purpose was to assess the teachers' CC. Second and most importantly, the existing questionnaires were not designed to be specifically linked to educational settings. Besides, the available questionnaires were mostly designed to assess native speakers' general CC level; however, in the present study, we needed a questionnaire to assess the CC of EFL teachers teaching English as a Foreign Language. Having recognized the shortcomings mentioned above, we decided to develop a new questionnaire to specifically assess teachers' CC, focusing on its pedagogical orientation as it related to foreign language education. As a result, the questionnaire was designed following the necessary steps and processes to ensure its psychometric properties.

First, the related literature was meticulously and deeply reviewed to specify the domain of CC. The keywords searched included, but were not limited to, critical consciousness, critical pedagogy, critical awareness, language awareness, critical literacy, critical teacher education and critical applied linguistics. After the main sources (e.g., Bartolome, 2004; Conagarajah, 1999a; Cook 1992, 1999; Crookes & Lehner, 1998; Freire, 1973, 1974; Norton & Toohey, 2004; Pavlenko & Blackledge, 2003; Pennycook, 2001, 2004, etc.) were found and meticulously studied, four focus group discussion sessions were held among the researchers of the study to narrow down the topic and specify the scope as related to second and/or foreign language teacher education. Then, four experts in the field with

specialization in critical approaches were consulted who also commented on the scope and the theme of CC. When there was a consensus regarding the principles underlying CC as they related to EFL teacher education, several sentences (over 200 sentences) were extracted from the sources mentioned above to form the basis of item development. Moreover, some items were also adopted or adapted from the available questionnaires in the field (Soodmand Afshar & Donyaie, 2019; McWhirter & McWhirter, 2016; Thomas et al., 2014). Finally, a five-point 44-item Likert scale questionnaire was developed with items ranging from strongly disagree (=1) to strongly agree (=5) as the first draft of the questionnaire, which was then subjected to several cycles of validation processes.

First, two experts who were Ph.D. holders in Applied Linguistics were requested to read the items and judge if they were appropriately worded and were not thus ambiguous, based on the comments of whom, initial modifications were made to ensure the content validity of the questionnaire. Four other Applied Linguists were asked to carefully read the questionnaire and comment on its items, based on whose comments, five items were eliminated and two items were split into two each as they were double-barreled items, thus leaving us with 41 items in total. Also, based on the comments made, the items were divided into three factors of teachers' current level of CC (factor 1, items 1 to 16), teachers' beliefs on the role of educational setting in creating CC (factor 2, items 17 to 30) and teachers' beliefs on what they should do to boost their CC (factor 3, items 31 to 41).

In the next stage, the questionnaire was piloted on 90 teachers (other than the participants of the study) who shared the same characteristics as the ones participating in the study. Statistical analyses were conducted on the responses obtained from the pilot study to ensure the reliability and validity of the questionnaire. In fact, to test the internal consistency of the questionnaire items, the Cronbach's alpha internal consistency reliability analysis was run, the results

of which indicated that the questionnaire enjoyed a very high level of internal consistency (α=.96). To ensure the validity of the questionnaire, a principal component factor analysis with Varimax rotation was conducted through SPSS (version 20). The results of the KMO Measure of Sampling Adequacy and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. *Results of KMO and Bartlett's Test for Pilot Study Questionnaire*

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy		.948
Bartlett's test of sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	11940.39
	df	820
	Sig.	.000

As shown in Table 1, the KMO measure is .94 for the questionnaire indicating high sampling adequacy. Also, factor loadings in the correlation matrix for all items exceeded .4, which confirmed the appropriateness of factor analysis. Moreover, cumulatively (i.e., all factors are taken into account), the items of the questionnaire accounted for nearly 70 % of the total variance, meaning that the items enjoyed a high validity index. After making sure that the questionnaire enjoyed high psychometric properties (i.e., reliability and validity) the data collection procedure started. The questionnaire can be found in Appendix 1.

The questionnaire was distributed in person to nearly 250 Iranian EFL teachers teaching in high schools, private language institutes, and universities in two cities selected conveniently. In order to access the teachers from other cities in the country to make the study nation-wide, an on-line version of the questionnaire was also designed electronically and sent out to on-line forums and groups whose members were potentially eligible to be considered as the participants of the study. Overall, 310 questionnaires were filled and returned. The data were collected in Autumn 2017 and took approximately three weeks. After the data were collected, the same procedures, as conducted in the piloting stage, were followed to ensure the reliability and validity of the questionnaire in

the study. That is, the Cronbach's alpha was recalculated indicating once again that the questionnaire enjoyed a high level of internal consistency (α=.92). To ensure the validity of the questionnaire, a Principal Component factor analysis with Varimax Rotation was once again conducted, the results of which are summarised in Table 2.

Table 2.*Results of KMO and Bartlett's Test for the Study Questionnaire*

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy		.881
Bartlett's test of sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	7169.119
	df	820
	Sig.	.000

As illustrated in Table 2, the results of the KMO Measure of Sampling Adequacy were indicative of high level of sampling adequacy (KMO=.881). Bartlett's test of Sphericity was also found to be significant. It was also found that, cumulatively, the factors lying beyond the items of the questionnaire accounted for nearly 64% of the total variance, indicating its high content validity. Moreover, KMO was also measured for the three factors separately which showed the indices .84, .86, .89 for factors 1, 2 and 3 respectively. Furthermore, to ensure the construct validity of the questionnaire and calculate the loadings of each item on the given factor more accurately, a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was run through AMOS (version 18). CFA is a rigorous statistical procedure that analyses the internal structure of a questionnaire, which measures not only the loadings of each item, but also the interrelationship among the items. The factor loadings indicate the correlation between the items and the factor(s) onto which they are loaded. Table 3 summarizes the results of CFA.

Table 3. *The Results of CFA*

Variable	Dimensions	Symbol	Question	Non-standard	standard	
				Estimate	Factor load (Lambda)	CR
Critical Consciousness (CC)	Current level of CC	(CB)	Q1	1.00	.496	-
			Q2	1.34	.59	7.69
			Q3	1.57	.76	11.60
			Q4	1.37	.68	8.30
			Q5	1.08	.58	7.64
			Q6	1.13	.59	7.64
			Q7	.73	.42	6.19
			Q8	1.27	.63	7.99
			Q9	1.09	.63	7.95
			Q10	1.15	.66	8.18
			Q11	1.13	.65	8.10
			Q12	1.43	.71	8.45
			Q13	1.83	.81	8.98
			Q14	1.54	.77	8.78
			Q15	1.73	.82	9.01
			Q16	1.65	.73	8.59
	The role of educational context in forming CC	(CP)	Q17	1.00	.60	-
			Q18	1.28	.66	9.72
			Q19	1.11	.59	8.92
			Q20	.92	.56	8.58
			Q21	1.19	.63	9.34
			Q22	1.44	.73	10.43
			Q23	1.42	.73	10.49
			Q24	1.28	.70	10.18
			Q25	1.39	.74	10.56
			Q26	1.41	.75	10.65
			Q27	1.21	.71	10.20
			Q28	1.30	.72	10.33
			Q29	1.38	.72	10.34
			Q30	.90	.54	8.30
	What actions to be taken to boost CC	(CR)	Q31	1.00	.793	-
			Q32	1.14	.88	18.46
			Q33	1.20	.88	18.38
			Q34	1.18	.89	18.76
			Q35	1.09	.88	18.39
			Q36	.87	.75	14.72
			Q37	.75	.73	14.22
			Q38	.61	.57	10.60
			Q39	.76	.71	13.68
			Q40	.77	.78	15.56
			Q41	.66	.58	10.84

As shown in Table 3, each item of the questionnaire adequately explained the related factor since the factor loading of each item exceeded 0.4. It is worth mentioning that had the factor loading of an item been less than 0.3, that item would have been eliminated from the questionnaire due to the weak relationship existing between the item and the factor. Figure 1 shows the standard structural model of the questionnaire.
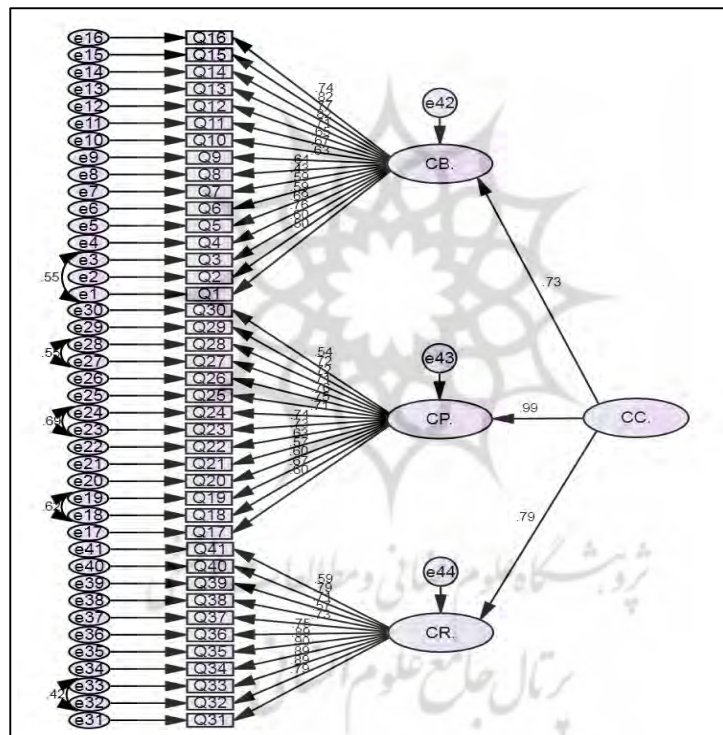

Figure 1. *Structural Model of the Questionnaire*

3. Results

To answer the first three research questions of the study, i.e. to investigate teachers' current level of CC, their beliefs on the role of educational system in creating CC and their beliefs on what they should do to boost their CC, the

descriptive statistics of the responses to all the 41 items of the questionnaire were calculated which are summarized in Table 4.

Table 4. *Descriptive Statistics for the Items of the Questionnaire*

items	Strongly disagree		Disagree		No idea		Agree		Strongly agree		Mean	Standard deviation
	F	P	F	P	F	p	F	p	F	P		
Q1	21	6.8	37	11.9	32	10.3	132	42.6	88	28.4	3.74	**1.18**
Q2	15	4.8	57	18.4	88	28.4	124	40	26	8.4	3.29	**1.01**
Q3	6	1.9	25	8.1	78	25.2	129	41.6	72	23.2	3.76	**.96**
Q4	7	2.3	29	9.4	48	15.5	127	41	99	31.9	3.91	**1.2**
Q5	13	4.2	49	15.8	102	32.9	116	37.4	30	9.7	3.33	**.99**
Q6	13	4.2	21	6.8	35	11.3	144	46.5	97	31.3	3.94	**1.03**
Q7	18	5.8	36	11.6	78	25.2	123	39.7	55	17.7	3.52	**1.09**
Q8	14	4.5	12	3.9	20	6.5	108	34.8	156	50.3	4.23	**1.04**
Q9	11	3.5	10	3.2	106	34.2	122	39.4	61	19.7	3.68	**.94**
Q10	4	1.3	22	7.1	53	17.1	158	51	73	23.5	3.88	**.89**
Q11	6	1.9	17	5.5	65	21	152	49	70	22.6	3.85	**.89**
Q12	11	3.5	48	15.5	43	13.9	148	47.7	60	19.4	3.64	**1.07**
Q13	6	1.9	13	4.2	30	9.7	147	47.4	114	36.8	4.13	**.89**
Q14	11	3.5	27	8.7	61	19.7	138	44.5	73	23.5	3.76	**1.02**
Q15	13	4.2	13	4.2	27	8.7	108	34.8	149	48.1	4.18	**1.04**
Q16	9	2.9	15	4.8	14	4.5	108	34.8	164	52.9	4.30	**.97**
Q17	34	11	82	26.5	64	20.6	86	27.7	44	14.2	3.08	**1.24**
Q18	31	10	81	26.1	78	25.2	76	24.5	44	14.2	3.07	**1.21**
Q19	27	8.7	66	21.3	60	19.4	117	37.7	40	12.9	3.25	**1.18**
Q20	24	7.7	35	11.3	71	22.9	89	28.7	91	29.4	3.61	**1.23**
Q21	23	7.4	56	18.1	50	16.1	100	32.3	81	26.1	3.52	**1.25**
Q22	9	2.9	61	19.7	65	21	109	35.2	66	21.3	3.52	**1.17**
Q23	18	5.8	39	12.6	65	21	129	41.6	59	19	3.55	**1.110**
Q24	16	5.2	44	14.2	70	22.6	126	40.6	54	17.4	3.51	**1.09**
Q25	12	3.9	45	14.5	60	19.4	134	43.2	59	19	3.59	**1.07**
Q26	12	3.9	34	11	57	18.4	124	40	83	26.8	3.75	**1.08**
Q27	14	4.5	33	10.6	82	26.5	116	37.4	65	21	3.60	**1.07**
Q28	12	3.9	27	8.7	70	22.6	124	40	77	24.8	3.73	**1.05**
Q29	14	4.5	24	7.7	66	21.3	106	34.2	100	32.3	3.82	**1.10**
Q30	14	4.5	62	20	74	23.9	119	38.4	41	13.2	3.36	**1.08**
Q31	15	4.8	17	5.5	10	3.2	105	33.9	163	52.6	4.24	**1.07**
Q32	8	2.6	13	4.2	29	9.4	104	33.5	156	50.3	4.25	**.96**
Q33	12	3.9	11	3.5	28	9	84	27.1	175	56.5	4.29	**1.03**
Q34	15	4.8	13	4.2	25	8.1	103	33.2	154	49.7	4.19	**1.07**
Q35	12	3.9	18	5.8	44	14.2	109	35.2	127	41	4.04	**1.06**
Q36	11	3.5	27	8.7	64	20.6	116	37.4	92	29.7	3.81	**1.06**
Q37	9	2.9	24	7.7	91	29.4	130	41.9	56	18.1	3.65	**1.07**
Q38	21	6.8	52	16.8	72	23.2	101	32.6	64	20.6	3.44	**1.18**
Q39	15	4.8	35	11.3	61	19.7	137	44.2	62	20	3.63	**1.07**
Q40	7	2.3	13	4.2	94	30.3	135	43.5	61	19.7	3.74	**.89**
Q41	18	5.8	37	11.9	63	20.3	115	37.1	77	24.8	3.36	**1.14**

As regards factor 1 (i.e., teachers' current level of CC which corresponds to items 1 to 16) that provided us with the answers to the first research question of the study, the means of all the items exceeded 3, meaning that, apart from items 1 (I try to adapt and adjust myself to any teaching situation) and 2 (I can accommodate to conditions imposed by authorities) where agreement shows lack of CC and thus they should be converted for analysis, the participants' current level of CC was relatively high (total mean=3.55). They mostly agreed and strongly agreed to all the items in this factor. The highest means obtained were 4.30, 4.23, 4.18 and 4.13 corresponding respectively to items 16 (I try to encourage my students' creative thinking), 8 (I feel socially and politically responsible in my profession), 15 (I try to encourage my students' critical thinking) and 13 (I try to act as a coordinator who engages students in dialogues instead of delivering lectures). However, the lowest means observed were for items 5 (I engage in dialogues with policymakers about the status of language teaching profession) and 7(I feel a sense of participation in my professional community by being involved in dialogues with authorities). Less than half of the participants (nearly 47 percent) agreed or strongly agreed with item 5 and nearly 57 percent of them showed agreement with item 7.

With regard to Factor 2 (i.e., teachers' beliefs on the role of educational system in creating CC which corresponds to items 17 to 30) which helped us to answer the second research question of the study, it can be seen that the means of all the items again exceeded 3 (total mean=3.46), meaning that the participants believed the current educational system did support and encourage CC. The highest means observed in this factor were related to items 29 (there is an unequal power relationship between English language teachers and policymakers), 26 (by encouraging memorization, our educational system does not enhance and appreciate language learners' authentic thought), and 28 (our educational system does not foster language learners' creative thinking) which

were found to be 3.82, 3.75 and 3.73 respectively. On the other hand, the participants slightly agreed with items 18 (our educational system requires all language teachers to behave in a uniform way) 17 (our educational system requires all language teachers to teach in a uniform way) and 19 (our educational system does not involve students in dialogues with teachers), with their mean being 3.07, 3.08 and 3.25 respectively.

Finally, considering factor 3 (i.e., teachers' beliefs on what they should do to boost CC) which was the subject of the third research question of the study, it was again observed that the means of all the items were above 3 (total mean= 3.89), which means that the majority of the participants either agreed or strongly agreed with the items of this factor. As for items 31 to 35, the mean was even above 4, showing the participants' strong agreement with the items. For instance, about 84 percent of the participants either agreed or strongly agreed (about 56 %) with item 33 (teachers should create an environment where language learners can interact and collaboratively negotiate the new language) and nearly 86 and 84 percent of the participants agreed or strongly agreed with items 31 and 32 (i.e., teachers should provide equal learning opportunities for all learners and that teachers' role should be to encourage students to engage collaboratively in socially-structured activities) in turn. Compared to other items, a smaller number of teachers showed agreement with item 41 (teachers should make language learners sensitive to the target culture), with the mean being 3.36.

Next, to answer the fourth research question of the study, a MANOVA was run to investigate whether age, teaching experience, gender, academic degree, and workplace differentiated EFL teachers with regard to their CC. Table 5 illustrates how the participants were divided into groups in each variable, and Table 6 summarizes the results of MANOVA.

Table 5. *The Distribution of Participants in Each Group*

		N
gender	male	104
	female	206
age	20-30	154
	31-40	101
	41and above	55
Academic degree	B.A	126
	M.A	151
	Ph.D.	33
Workplace	university	52
	school	126
	Private Lg. institutes	132
Experience	1-4	62
	5-8	94
	9 and above	154

Table 6. *The Results of MANOVA*

Corrected Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
gender	.16	1	.16	.64	.42	.00
age	1.95	2	.97	3.91	.02	.03
Academic degree	.90	2	.45	1.81	.16	.01
workplace	2.98	2	1.49	5.97	.00	.04
Experience	.45	2	.22	.91	.40	.00

As can be seen in Table 6, among the variables included, age and workplace significantly differentiated teachers with regard to their CC. Moreover, the difference between male and female teachers with regard to their CC was found not to be significant (f=.64, P=.42>0.05). In other words, it can be argued that gender acted as a neutral factor in this regard. As also illustrated in Table 6,

contrary to our expectation, the academic degree did not differentiate teachers in terms of their CC (F=1.81, P=1.16>.05). Also, the experience was not found to be a significant factor in differentiating teachers in this regard (F=.91, P=.40).

4. Discussion

In general, based on the responses to the items showing the participants' current level of CC (factor 1), teachers reported an approximately above the average level of CC for all items except for items 1 and 2 as agreement to these items showed lack of CC. As revealed, most participants agreed that the ability to adapt to any teaching situation without questioning it was a sign of acceptable behavior, probably due to being raised in such a context where adaptation is praised. However, this ideology is severely challenged by Freire (1973) who warns us that adaptation is a common behavior in the animal realm displayed by human. In contrast to this behavior stands integration, a behavior distinctively exhibited by human. Freire believes that integration stems from 'the capacity to adapt oneself to reality *plus* the critical capacity to make choices and to transform that reality' (P. 4). In other words, integrated teachers are known to be the subject of change in their profession, whereas adaptive teachers are the object of the process. It is stated that when one cannot change reality, they try to adapt to it. In fact, this form of behavior will finally lead to an anti-democratic mentality. Of course, part of this lack of critical behavior on the part of teachers can be attributed to the context of language education, i.e. Iran, where all teachers need to conform fully to the regulations imposed by the institution where they teach if they want to secure their job there. To clarify the issue, a personal account of one of the authors can be given here. He was once assigned to teach an EAP (English for Academic Purposes) course at university to B.A. students. Prior to the course, the requirements of the course such as the textbook to be taught, the number of units to be taught, the way to teach each skill and

component, the assessment procedure, to name only a few, were dictated to the instructor and the instructor had to conform fully to the situation; otherwise, he would be called a non-conformist who was in danger of losing the position. The purpose of all this is said to be standardization, but this tends to put the teachers' democracy and the professional aspect of teaching in danger (Milner, 2013). In this situation, the only thing to do is to adjust oneself to it. Surprisingly, most teachers agreed that they wanted to be the subject of change in their profession not the object of it, not knowing that adapting to the given situation implies being the object of change rather than the subject of it.

It was also observed that many teachers reported engagement in dialogues with colleagues and policymakers about the status of language education in the county and that they felt a sense of participation in their professional community by doing so although comparatively a smaller number of teachers reported having dialogues with authorities and policymakers than with their colleagues. This finding is not surprising as teachers often converse in the recess time or the refreshment time while having access to policymakers is particularly difficult in the existing context of the present study. In fact, there seems to be a deep and unbridgeable gap between teachers and policymakers in this regard. That is, if there ever happens to be a meeting or convention, it takes a form of a unilateral monologue given by policymakers rather than a dialogue through which both parties can freely express their ideas and concerns. Of course, it should be noted that the mere engagement in dialogue does not necessarily imply teachers' high CC. The content of dialogues is also of paramount importance. Teachers should, therefore, engage in critical dialogues (Freire, 1974) about the problems detected in the educational system and then intervene to effect change and transform the status quo. This way they can make their voice heard in their professional community.

Moreover, most teachers either agreed or strongly agreed that they encouraged their students' critical and creative thinking. As mentioned by Freire (1974), critical thinking and creative thinking are both necessary for participating in a problem-posing pedagogy and are essential aspects of CC. Instead of providing solutions to the problems, the purpose of education is said to be the development of critical thinking by posing problems, i.e. problematizing, by asking learners to reflect and act on the issues at hand (Crawford, 1978). For Smith (1990), critical thinking and creative thinking are the same and correspond to the generation and selection of options. As Nieto and Bode (2012) maintain, teaching for social justice can be an effective way to encourage students' critical thinking and, consequently, their CC. Teaching for social justice has been found to be a major concern for critical theorists especially since the introduction of Freire's works (1973, 1974).

In general, based on the responses to the items showing teachers' beliefs on the role of educational context in encouraging CC, the participants believed the current situational system did not form and facilitate the development of CC. Teachers mostly agreed with the point that the educational context where they worked did not involve students in dialogue with teachers and policymakers. The role of dialogue is highly emphasized in the literature (Crookes & Lehner, 1998; Freire, 1974) as a factor forming the content of the educational situation and helping CC to develop. The rationale behind this dialogic interaction is that knowledge is socially constructed and that to learn and develop CC, all the parties involved in education should critically engage in dialogic processes.

A serious issue raised by the participants was that they mostly believed the distribution of power was not equal among teachers, students, and policymakers. In other words, the majority of the teachers were of the opinion that there existed an unequal power relationship between the teachers and the students on the one hand and between the teachers and the policymakers on the other, although the

latter one was agreed by more teachers. This unequal power relation has led to a situation where the policymakers ruthlessly dictate, the teachers blindly accept and transmit and the students simply obey. This form of education tends to disempower the teachers and in turn, the students and removes the possibility of developing CC and does not let the teachers and students practice democracy. Canagarajah (1999) asserts that,

> The classroom does not have to be at the mercy of power dictated unilaterally from above—by the larger social institutions. It has the relative autonomy not only to negotiate these sources of power but also to develop alternative discourses and power equations within its own walls. We have to consider power as not necessarily exercised top to bottom; institutions like the school may serve to reconstitute power relations bottom up (p. 211).

As also revealed by the results of the study, the teachers mostly agreed with the fact that teachers should provide equal learning opportunities for all students. Schools are viewed as being potentially unequal sites of knowledge distribution (Kanpol, 1999) and despite the controversy over the issue, not enough effort has been made to design programs to equalize education for diverse groups of students. This is a particularly thorny issue in the context of the present study especially at universities and schools as the students with differing levels of English language proficiency from different socio-economic status receive the same form of instruction imposed to the teachers by the authorities, which is totally in contrast to the tenets of critical pedagogy.

An interesting finding of the present study was that gender acted as a neutral factor with respect to teachers' CC and their views of the educational context. Conflicting results have been reported in the literature especially in the context of the present study about the role of gender in criticality. For example, this finding seems to support the results of Soodmand Afshar and Donyaie (2019),

who also found that gender did not differentiate Iranian EFL teachers in terms of their CP perception. On the contrary, Aliakbari and Allahmoradi (2011) found a significant difference between male and female teachers' views on the principles of CP in the EFL context of Iran. They attributed this difference to the culture of the country where men have more freedom to express ideas and to the sociological differences between genders, arguing that females are more conservative and, as a result, more subservient. However, the present study showed that female teachers were as critically conscious as their male counterparts discrediting the belief that women tend to be obedient without the power of questioning.

As shown previously, the academic degree did not differentiate the participants with respect to their CC. This might be explained by considering the fact that even in M.A. and Ph.D. programs in the EFL context of Iran, CC is not very much appreciated and highlighted; instead, the banking model of education is encouraged and emphasized. The banking model of education is a term adopted by Freire (1974) to refer to a learning context where learners' minds are regarded as empty vessels to be filled by the knowledge deposited by educators. Therefore, based on this model, the learner's task is simply to receive, memorize and repeat. Freire (1974) warns us that this model of education discourages critical thinking and finally leads to oppression. Our findings in this regard do not seem to support those of other researchers in the country (e.g., Soodmand Afshar & Donyaie, 2019) who found that academic degree significantly differentiated EFL teachers' perceptions of CP. Of course, one plausible explanation of why academic degree did not affect the CC of the participants in the present study might go back to the disproportionate number of participants in each group. Had there been more Ph.D. holders of Applied Linguistics among the participants of the study, different results might have been obtained.

Surprisingly, it was found that teaching experience did not significantly differentiate teachers with regard to their CC but age did so. This discrepancy might be explained by referring to the fact that when teachers become more experienced, they tend to become more conservative and adaptive due to many reasons such as the fear of losing a job when they desperately need one, lack of interest in self-development or even the feeling of indifference to the social and political context surrounding them. Also, it could be argued that the principles of CC have just recently entered second language teacher education, especially in developing countries like Iran. Thus younger teachers are probably more exposed to and acquainted with them. In other words, older teachers might have passed their teacher training courses (TTC) long ago when such recent concepts as CC and CP were not very much in vogue and when the old models of teacher education were practiced. Wallace (1995), for instance, presents three models of teacher education programs that are chronologically characterized as the craft model, the applied science model and the reflective model. The craft model is the oldest model of teacher training positing that teaching is learned through training delivered by the trainer. The teacher's job is only confined to following and imitating the trainer. The second model, i.e. the applied science model, is probably the most popular and widely used model of teacher education. In this model, a professional trainer who is an expert in content knowledge (Applied Linguistics in our case) transmits knowledge and expertise to the practitioners and novice would-be teachers. These are the common types of TTC courses normally offered even at present in the context of the present study, which cannot deeply plant the seeds of CC in the minds of Iranian EFL teachers, as they reduce teachers to sheer imitators who lack creativity, criticality and reflectivity. The third model described by Wallace (1995) is the reflective model, which is the most recent trend in teacher education and is in line with the sociocultural and critical approaches to language education. This model holds

that a novice teacher develops professionally by constantly reflecting on his/her own practices. Therefore, the key to the development of CC is engaging in self–reflection and dialogue with both colleagues and authorities and feeling socially and politically responsible, as reflected in the items of the questionnaire.

Finally, it was observed that the workplace, i.e. the institutions where the participants worked, significantly differentiated the participants in terms of their CC. The justification is possibly the point that teachers in different institutions in the study might have different levels of freedom. Part–time university lecturers and particularly teachers at schools are required to practice what they are told to do. For instance, due to the standardization purposes, all high school teachers have to attend some briefing and coordination courses before the start of the new school year in which all they have to do is dictated to them. Thus, there is no room for them to object to the status quo and to try to transform it. Britzman (2000) condemns a national curriculum in which views of teachers are censored and where controversies are avoided, because, as she rightly holds, controversies of the world deserve consideration.

4. Conclusion and Pedagogical Implications

With the status of English in the world today and the growing need to learn it as an international language (EIL), teachers need to be aware of such issues as sociocultural context where they teach, agency, domination and power relationship, the native/non–native binary as well as the kind of pedagogy which is culturally, socially and politically loaded if they are to transform the status quo and move towards a just and democratic education. The key to such awareness is believed to be in the development of CC. To investigate the CC of Iranian EFL teachers, this study was thus conducted, considering also the role of such factors as gender, age, teaching experience, academic degree, and workplace. As the results revealed, considering the responses to the items of the questionnaire, the

teachers' current level of CC was rather high, although they mostly believed that the educational context of the present study did not facilitate the development of CC. However, as suggested by Gay and Kirkland (2003), CC is a matter which can be developed and promoted.

As the results indicated, most teachers believed the educational context of the present study did not facilitate CC development. Therefore, to promote CC, two essential measures that can be taken include engaging teachers in dialogue and reflection. As Freire (1974) notes, the drive to the development of CC is a dialogue among different stakeholders, which stands in contrast to the tenets of the banking model of education in which knowledge is believed to be imparted from teachers to learners in a one-way unilateral top-to-down process. This process results in domination and unequal power relationships and stifles CC on the part of both teachers and learners since they have to accept the situation as it is and adapt themselves to it. Therefore, to develop teachers' CC, dialogue should find its way into teacher training courses. As the results of the study revealed, teachers tried to engage in dialogue with their students, colleagues, and policymakers whereas the educational context discouraged dialogue. Thus, teachers and policymakers are suggested to transform the context by including dialogue as the main principle of education. Furthermore, since the other essential factor in the development of CC is reflection (Rodriguez, 2008), teachers are also recommended to engage in reflection if they want to develop CC and in turn, change the situation for a more democratic one. Teachers can be engaged in reflection by writing journals and participating in focus group discussions. The significance attached to reflective writing as a means of teacher learning and development is gradually being recognized in some contexts (Burns & Pachler, 2004; Burton, 2005).

Moreover, as indicated by the results of the study, teachers should participate in some teacher training courses to unlearn (Botelho & Gibson−

Gates, 2008) the premises of the banking model of education to which they might have been exposed during the whole course of their profession and learn new methods of teaching and learning which are more in keeping with the critical approaches. Further, the normalization and standardization in education which is highly emphasized in teacher training courses these days, and which was believed by teacher participants of the study to form the structure of the educational context of the present study should be replaced by more localized approaches which allow the teachers to question the situation, to engage in dialogues with their students and policymakers and make their voices heard in their community. Dantas-Whitney and Waldschmidt (2009) warn against viewing language education as a nonlocalized activity in which the individual needs of students are neglected in the belief that there can be a tailor-made one-size-fits-all framework that can be adopted in all (EFL/ESL) settings and contexts to help students succeed. Instead, they stress that teachers have to regard teaching as a situated activity wherein the needs of the learners should be sought when making decisions. Also, they maintain that teaching should not be viewed as a neutral act and that social, cultural, political and economic factors should be taken into account.

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Appendix 1: The CC questionnaire

The Critical consciousness Questionnaire

Dear professor and English teacher,

The following questionnaire is aimed at eliciting university instructors and language teachers' critical consciousness and behaviour. I do appreciate your taking time to fill out the questionnaire by marking the extent you agree or disagree with each item.

You do not need to write your name, but I would be grateful if you share such background information as your age, academic degree, gender, and the length of teaching experience. You can be assured that your responses are kept confidential and used only for the purposes of the present study.

I would like to thank you in advance for you sincere cooperation.

Name..

Gender: male☐   female☐

Age: ……………   academic degree: ………………

Years of teaching experience:

University:......................years

School:......................years

Private language Institutes:.................years

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly disagree	Disagree	No specific idea	agree	Strongly agree

1	I try to adapt and adjust myself to any teaching situation.	1	2	3	4	5
2	I can accommodate to conditions imposed by authorities.	1	2	3	4	5
3	I try to be the subject of change in my profession rather than the object of it.	1	2	3	4	5
4	I engage in dialogues with my colleagues about the status of language teaching profession.	1	2	3	4	5
5	I engage in dialogue with the policy makers about the status of language teaching profession.	1	2	3	4	5
6	I feel a sense of participation in my professional community by being involved in dialogues with colleagues.	1	2	3	4	5

7	I feel a sense of participation in my professional community by being involved in dialogues with authorities.	1	2	3	4	5
8	I feel socially and politically responsible in my profession.	1	2	3	4	5
9	I believe that language literacy should be directed at democratisation of culture.	1	2	3	4	5
10	I try to detect the problems in the way of language literacy in our educational system.	1	2	3	4	5
11	I discuss the problems faced in language education in my context and intervene to effect change.	1	2	3	4	5
12	I try to engage students in decision making about the materials to work in the classroom.	1	2	3	4	5
13	I try to act as a coordinator who engages students in dialogues instead of delivering lectures.	1	2	3	4	5
14	I try to make my voice heard in my professional community.	1	2	3	4	5
15	I try to encourage my students' critical thinking.	1	2	3	4	5
16	I try to encourage my students' creative thinking.	1	2	3	4	5
17	Our educational system requires all language teachers to teach in a uniform way.	1	2	3	4	5
18	Our educational system requires all language teachers to behave in a uniform way.	1	2	3	4	5
19	Our educational system does not involve students in dialogue with teachers.	1	2	3	4	5
20	Our educational system does not involve students in dialogue with policy makers.	1	2	3	4	5
21	Our educational system is not open for teachers to exchange ideas.	1	2	3	4	5
22	Our educational system requires teachers to accommodate to the ideas dictated to them.	1	2	3	4	5
23	Our educational system does not encourage teachers' reflection on their teaching.	1	2	3	4	5
24	Our educational system does not encourage teachers' reflection on their behaviour.	1	2	3	4	5
25	Our educational system requires teachers to work on students rather than to work with them.	1	2	3	4	5
26	By encouraging memorisation, our educational system does not enhance and appreciate language learners' authentic thoughts.	1	2	3	4	5

27	Our educational system does not foster language learners' critical reflection.	1	2	3	4	5
28	Our educational system does not foster language learners' critical thinking.	1	2	3	4	5
29	There is an unequal power relationship between English language teachers and policy makers.	1	2	3	4	5
30	There is an unequal power relationship between English language teachers and the students.	1	2	3	4	5
31	Teachers should provide equal learning opportunities for all learners.	1	2	3	4	5
32	Teacher's role should be to encourage students to engage collaboratively in socially-structured activities.	1	2	3	4	5
33	Teachers should create an environment where language learners can interact and collaboratively negotiate the new language.	1	2	3	4	5
34	Teachers should focus on not only what learners know, but also who they are.	1	2	3	4	5
35	Teachers should influence the lives of their learners and contribute to the social transformation of the larger world.	1	2	3	4	5
36	Teachers should make language learners sensitive to their culture.	1	2	3	4	5
37	Teachers should construct tests in collaboration with those tested.	1	2	3	4	5
38	Teachers should make their language learners aware of the fact that English language carries Western ideologies.	1	2	3	4	5
39	Teachers should adapt ELT materials to suit the language learners' cultural values.	1	2	3	4	5
40	Teachers should include the knowledge of diverse groups on language tests.	1	2	3	4	5
41	Teachers should make language learners sensitive to the target culture.	1	2	3	4	5