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### Research Paper

# An Exploration of Iranian Teachers' Professional and Institutional Identities and their Enactment of Critical Pedagogy

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## Abstract

This study aimed to investigate the relationship between Iranian EFL teachers' professional and institutional identities, and their implementation of critical pedagogy. In order to address the research questions of this study, a mixed-method design was employed. Survey type approach and interview were used. Through convenience sampling, 121 EFL teachers from different private language institutes took part in the study by completing the professional identity questionnaire, the institutional Identity questionnaire, and the critical pedagogy implementation questionnaire. In the second phase of the study, for triangulating the data, 11 of the participants were interviewed. To analyze the data, Pearson product-moment correlation, multiple-regression, and qualitative content analyses were run. The obtained results pointed to the significant relationship both between EFL teachers' institutional identity and their implementation of critical pedagogy, and EFL teachers' professional identity and their implementation of critical pedagogy. Moreover, teachers' institutional identity was found to be predictive of their

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implementation of critical pedagogy. The study's findings have implications for teacher educators and language academies.

**Keywords:** Critical Pedagogy, Institutional Identity, Professional Identity, EFL Teacher

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## 1. Introduction

Education is of considerable importance for society and the people in it. The fact that teachers play an important role in the educational context is undeniable, because they can provide their students with various opportunities to make them realize their abilities and transform them into skills and abilities on the way to self-realization. Therefore, one of the most important issues that should be considered in the context of globalization is teacher identity. More specifically, institutional identity, which refers to how teachers realize their relationship to the educational context, how this relationship is built over time (teaching experience) and place (institution), and how they perceive their possibilities for the future (Azimi, 2012, p. 11), needs more attention and investigation. This is because of the significant impact of societal change on education (Menter, 2010; Zohrabi & Khalili, 2023). Even though the concept of identity is controversial, there is a consensus in the fact that identity is not a trait one can own but is instead a relational phenomenon that teachers themselves adopt or are attributed to them (Varghese et al., 2005).

In the past few decades, different aspects of teachers' identities have become separate areas of study in the field of applied linguistics, and many researchers have tried to explore dimensions of teacher identity (e.g., Azimi, 2012; Farrokhi, et al., 2023). Among others, however, most of the studies have just focused on some narrow aspects of the issue, or it has been a

subsidiary variable for investigating other related topics, such as the processes of cognitive-affective that a teacher might undergo in the reformational context (van Veen et al., 2005). Furthermore, there is a lack of research in the literature on the relationship between different aspects of EFL teacher identity and issues related to critical teaching practices and preferences.

Although there have been studies regarding teachers' identity and critical thinking in the literature, it should be noted that while critical thinking and critical pedagogy are linked and share some common concerns, they are different concepts. This justifies research on the relationship between EFL teachers' professional and institutional identities and their practicing of critical pedagogy in their classes.

Considering the great advantage of critical pedagogy in the process of teaching and the prominent roles of teachers' different aspects of identity, the current study intended to examine the relationship between the professional and institutional identities of EFL teachers and their implementation of critical pedagogy in their classes. Studies on the teachers are vital because they are directly in contact with the students, which consequently affects the whole language learning process. Consequently, research on teachers can also present fruitful insights into educational efficacy (Lewis & Riley, 2009). This study is theoretically crucial as it sheds light on the relationship between the EFL teachers' professional and institutional identities and their implementation of critical pedagogy. From the practical point of view, the study's results can be of great value to the educational fields, teacher training centers, and language institutes.

Critical pedagogy has proven itself to be an effective way to obviate some of the problems of teacher identity. In recent decades, the topic of critical pedagogy has been one of the focuses of research in the field of education,

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and the importance of practicing critical pedagogy in education as well as the role of society, values, government, and political changes in second language classrooms were questioned. According to Qian (2007), teachers' role as mere transmitters of knowledge has made them absolute authorities in the classroom, and students are not expected to question this dominion, which ultimately stops students from fostering opinions and thoughts. Throughout using critical manners, teachers can encourage their students to doubt hierarchies and accepted norms. They require their students to reexamine such accepted norms in light of perspectives presented in class (Freire, 1997). Critical pedagogy in language education is a standpoint in language curriculum theory and pedagogy practice that advocates and advances teaching and the study of languages in ways that would advance social equity. Given this background, the present research endeavors to investigate the conceivable relationship between Iranian EFL teachers' professional and organization identities, to their implementation of critical pedagogy. From these subjects of inquiry, the following questions were drawn:

1. Is there any significant relationship between EFL teachers' professional identity and their implementation of critical pedagogy?
2. Is there any significant relationship between EFL teachers' institutional identity and their implementation of critical pedagogy?
3. Is there any significant difference between EFL teachers' institutional and professional identities in predicting their implementation of critical pedagogy?

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 Teacher Identity: Professional and Institutional

Teacher identity construction has been described as a novel and different topic in the field of language teaching in the last two decades. Salinas and Ayala (2018), believe that teacher identity has an extensive literature with

distinct foci, such as social recognition, the way instructors learn to act as experts, how they employ theory in their instructional methods, how they make theories of their own practices or the way they perform as teachers. Research in language teaching provides insight into the educational development of pre-service, novice, and in-service teachers from various perspectives. Bucholtz (2003) claims that teachers, during their professions (pre-service, beginning, or experienced), maintain implicit assumptions and identities about students, their instructing subjects, their roles as teachers, and their duties and that these identities affect teachers' responses to teacher education and their educating style and techniques. Fernando et al. (2020) define teacher identity as the meaning individuals attribute to themselves and others assigned to them, and they believe that both of them are continually being altered as a result of teachers' interaction in the teaching context.

In a highly cited article, Varghese et al. (2005, p. 21) said that the emerging subject of language teacher identity is an interesting area in research on language teacher education and teacher development. However, the theorization of teacher identity deserves more attention. Freeman (1995, p. 581) states that it is crucial to investigate how participants (i.e., teachers) interpret their worlds and how they realize their environment and experience. "Teachers' identities are deeply implicated in their teaching" (Nieto, 1999, p. 16), and accordingly, they should be considered as one of the imperative issues in the field of language teacher education. Similarly, Puglia (2008) believes that the level of teachers' identities perception influences their quality of teaching.

Professional identity is one of the most important types of identity and has been the subject of research in various fields, such as law (Khalili, et al., 2024; Prat, Rockmann, & Kaufmann, 2006), medical profession (Mather et al., 2001), and also education (Beijaard et al., 2004; Dobakhti, et al., 2023a).

The concept of professional identity derives from the notion of social identity theory (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1993; Zohrabi & Akbarzadeh, 2023), which implies that identity is constructed socially. Slay and Smith (2011) state that professional identity is considered a part of social identity and is associated with work-based self-concepts. Richter et al. (2021) maintain that it is vital to investigate the elements of teacher professional identity to develop more effective teacher education programs and subsequently bring up better and professional teachers through those programs. Hooley (2007) believes that a good teacher should have a strong sense of professionalism and professional identity. To Lasky (2005), professional identity is the way the professional roles of teachers are defined by themselves. It is the professional self-perception each individual realizes about themselves as a result of their experiences, motives, beliefs, and values (Ibarra, 1999; Dobakhti, et al., 2022). To Jalilifar et al. (2014), the effects of teachers' professional identity development can be observed in different aspects of their professional careers and performances.

Teachers' experiences and perceptions of their profession, working conditions, and accomplishments have a profound impact on their performance and the quality and effectiveness of their teaching (Dobakhti, et al., 2023b; Grion & Varisco, 2007). Knowles (1992) relates the concept of professional identity to the images of self he argues that these concepts or images of self strongly influence teachers' performance. Likewise, Renee (2013) maintains that the way teachers professionally perceive and define themselves significantly impacts their efficiency, maintenance, and classroom practice. According to Habibi and Ganjali (2021), professional identity of EFL teachers has a significant bearing on their sense of responsibility as a teacher in the classroom.

Considering the social aspect of professional identity (Smith, 1991), a directly related concept is institutional identity. In this regard, North (1990, as cited in Woerdman, 2004, p. 57) believed that institution could be described as the humanly designed limitations that shape human relations or, less formally, "the rules of the game in society." To Agar (1985), the institution is a socially legitimized expertise along with the people who have the authority authorized to implement it. Gee (2001) refers to institutional identity as the positions people maintain or the environment around those positions. Azimi (2012) defines institutional identity as the way teachers recognize their relationship to the educational context, and the path through which relationship is formed in the passage of time (teaching experience) and place (institution), and the way they recognize their opportunities for the future. Gohier et al. (2007) specify that teachers' institutional identity is linked to different factors, such as students and their achievements, coworkers, and all other components of the institute system. Hogg (2006) uses the concept of collective identity when he refers to an institutional identity. Mainly based on this definition of collective identity, institutional identity is defined as a process whereby group members regard and exercise specific attributes favored by the teaching context. Puusa (2006) explains institutional identity by stating that institutional identity intends to represent an institution's core and provides a sequence of meanings for understanding the actions and attitudes of the institutional members. According to Ghafar Samar et al. (2011), different variables can affect teachers' performance, one of which is the institution they work in and the way they relate themselves to it. Soodmand Afshar and Moradifar (2020) observed that institutional sense of belonging increases teachers' job performance and also it could strongly predict EFL teachers' job performance.

### **2.3 Critical pedagogy**

In history, critical pedagogy can be deemed as an educational philosophy. Its root can be traced to the work of the Frankfurt school, which emerged before the Second World War. Frankfurt School's critical theory began to deliver a revolutionary theory and analysis of education "while annexing new advances in social theory and developing new categories of inquiry and new methodologies" (McLaren, 1998, p.163). It earned special prominence through Paulo Freire works; he shared his experience of teaching illiterate adults in his famous book, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970), Kincheloe (2004, p. 49) maintains "Indeed, all work in critical pedagogy after him [Freire] has to reference his work". The educational viewpoint of Freire (2000) implies that education's goal of developing critical thinking by demonstrating people's condition to them as a problem so that they can comprehend, contemplate, and perform upon it. According to Thornbury (2006), Freire could distinguish between the traditional models of education, where learners were regarded as an empty entity to be filled by predefined knowledge, and the problem-posing model of education, which was a system of education based on equality, and liberty. Moen (2008) claims critical pedagogy is pivotal in bonding relations between theory and practice in education. He further adds that critical pedagogy is a form of education that recognizes the status quo and its maintenance. Also, it requires engaging with the alternative version of the existing society. Critical pedagogy is a teaching approach that allows the students to think and engage critically with issues (Kalsom & Malick, 2020). Crawford-Lange (1981) believes that the student's life circumstances should be the preliminary content of the curriculum, and dialogue should shape the context of the educational environment. In this vein, Students are provided with the opportunity of mastering materials produced themselves, and the teacher participates in the

learning process as a peer among learners. Akbari (2007) claims that implementing critical pedagogy in EFL classrooms can allow for employing problem-solving approaches, ultimately enabling students to activate and exercise their critical thinking. Asakereh and Weis (2018) state that practicing critical pedagogy in ELT classrooms enables students to develop critical awareness and challenge their own and others' knowledge by communicating their critical ideas.

Canagarajah (1999) notes that critical pedagogy can be investigated in ELT, reproduction, and resistance models through two different stances. Reproduction models attempt to illustrate the way students are prepared mentally and behaviorally in their journey of schooling to serve the prevailing social institutions and groups. In contrast, resistance models seek to demonstrate how there are adequate contradictions within those institutions to support learners obtain a voice, develop critical thinking, and create change. These two perspectives have different theoretical principles. While Marxism and Structuralism have given rise to reproduction models of critical pedagogy, resisting models of critical pedagogy are originated from post-structuralism.

To steer clear of any ambiguities, distinguishing critical thinking and critical pedagogy is of high importance. Pennycook (1999) distinguishes them by arguing that the former is generally apolitical and is only concerned with developing a questioning ability in people. On the contrary, the latter has to do with a political understanding of the educational context, as well as the societal attitudes, and preparing students to question not only the accepted norms but also transform them.

### 3. Method

#### 3.1 Design of the study

For addressing the research questions of this study, the mixed-method design was employed, characterized by the collection and analysis of quantitative data in the first phase, followed by collecting and analyzing the qualitative data in the second phase. The quantitative phase encompasses data collection via questionnaires. The qualitative phase involves conducting a semi-structured interview with some of the surveyed participants. The predictor variables of the study included EFL teachers' professional and institutional identities. Also, EFL teachers' implementation of critical pedagogy was regarded as the predicted or dependent variable of the study.

#### 3.2 Quantitative phase

##### 3.2.1 Participants

The participants were 121 conveniently selected EFL teachers in Tabriz, Urmia, and Tehran, who were teaching at private language institutes. They were asked to complete the questionnaires on the teacher's professional identity, Institutional identity, and critical pedagogy implementation. Participants' demographic and professional information is presented below in Table 1.

**Table 1**  
*Demographic Information of the Participants*

| Characteristics        | Groups      | N  | Percentage |
|------------------------|-------------|----|------------|
| Educational background | Master      | 54 | 44.6       |
|                        | Bachelor    | 41 | 33.9       |
|                        | Certificate | 15 | 12.4       |
|                        | Ph.D.       | 9  | 7.4        |
|                        | Associate   | 2  | 1.7        |
| Experience             | 0 to 4      | 50 | 41.3       |
|                        | 5 to 9      | 45 | 37.2       |
|                        | 10 to 14    | 21 | 17.4       |
|                        | 15 to 20    | 4  | 3.3        |
|                        | Over 21     | 1  | 0.8        |
| Gender                 | Female      | 65 | 53.7       |
|                        | Male        | 56 | 46.3       |

### 3.2.2 Instruments

Three questionnaires were used in the quantitative phase to measure each teacher's professional identity, institutional identity, and their implementation of critical pedagogy.

*Professional Identity Questionnaire:* To assess participants' professional identity, the Professional Identity questionnaire, designed by Liou (2008), was employed. This questionnaire includes two main parts. Part A holds eight 5-point Likert scale items focusing on English teachers' professional identity, their understanding of the social status of their own occupations, their evaluation and dedication to their careers, and their awareness of their students' attitudes regarding their instruction. Hence, the participants responded to the items by selecting their level of agreement or disagreement with the questionnaire items on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The validity and reliability of this questionnaire were approved by Liou (2008). The questionnaire was reported by Liou (2008) to have a satisfactory reliability of 0.85 on Cronbach's Alpha, which is fairly acceptable reliability. The questionnaire was also checked for internal consistency in the context of the present study, and an Alpha index of 85.9 was reported.

*Institutional Identity Questionnaire:* The institutional identity questionnaire developed by Azimi (2012), a 34-item questionnaire on a five-point Likert scale, was the second instrument the researcher used to assess the participants' level of institutional identity. Following a comprehensive review of the literature and interviews with scholars of the field, Azimi (2012) came up with the first list of 39 items. A further meticulous check of the items led to the omission of five items. The remaining 34 items were relevant items on the nine theoretical components. The inventory, with items ranging from 'strongly disagree' to 'strongly agree,' was then administered to a group of 42

teachers with similar characteristics to the final participants of the study. The questionnaire was reported by Azimi (2012) to enjoy high reliability and validity. The instrument was double-checked for internal consistency and Alpha index of 0.925 was reported.

*Teacher Critical Pedagogy (TCP) Questionnaire:* TCP questionnaire developed by Roohani, Hashemian, and Haghparast (2016) was used to calculate the amount of implementation of critical pedagogy by the teachers. The questionnaire has two main parts and was developed and prepared in English. The first part comprises six categories of instructors' personal information related to (a) demographic information, such as gender, age, academic degree, years of teaching experience, and academic major, and (b) present teaching circumstances, such as teaching time per week. The second part comprises 35 items, including six themes altogether. Each item was developed on a 5-point Likert-type format, ranging from 1 (Strongly Agree) to 5 (Strongly Disagree). As one of the commonly accepted Likert scales in the education field the five-point Likert scale was used (Cheng, 2004). For this study, exclusively the second part of this instrument was used. The internal consistency for this part was checked by the researcher, and Alpha index of .92 was obtained.

### 3.2.3 Procedure

To obtain and measure the information of the teachers on professional identity, institutional identity, and their implementation of critical pedagogy, the three questionnaires were administered to the participants, either directly or through some colleagues. Both hard and online versions of the questionnaires were used. They were given instructions, clarifying what they were supposed to do. Having collected the quantitative data, the researcher began the data analysis to address the research questions. In this study, the data analyses were carried out using both descriptive and

inferential statistics. First of all, the data were scrutinized for univariate (through Z-scores), and multivariate (through Mahalanobis Distances) outliers and, consequently, the normality of Professional and Institutional Identities and Critical Pedagogy were computed through skewness and kurtosis. To answer the first and second research questions, the Pearson product-moment correlation was run after the related assumptions were ascertained. Finally, concerning the last research question, two separate simple linear regressions were run.

### **3.3 Qualitative phase**

#### **3.3.1 Participants**

The eight teachers who had gained the highest scores and three of the teachers who gained the lowest scores on the professional and institutional identity questionnaires from the quantitative phase were selected to get interviewed on the way they implement critical pedagogy in their classes.

#### **3.3.2 Instrument**

Semi-structured interviews were employed in this phase; topics and questions submitted to the interviewee were carefully developed to obtain the interviewee's ideas and beliefs on the subject of interest, in contrast to leading the interviewee toward predetermined choices. They rely on the interviewer's following up with investigations to get in-depth data on topics of interest. Two basic principles here are (1) avoiding leading the interview or imposing meanings and (2) attempting to build a relaxed and comfortable environment for the conversation.

#### **3.3.3 Interview Questions**

The author first predefined some themes according to which he was able to develop the questions used in the interviews. Five open-ended questions were designed to elicit as much information as possible from the interviewees. The questions were piloted by interviewing four colleague

teachers, and based on those interviews, some parts of the questions were modified to gain as much information as possible by the questions in the interview sessions.

#### 3.3.4 Procedure

All the interviews were performed face-to-face. Qualitative Content Analysis (CA) was used in this phase to analyze the qualitative data obtained from interviews. In order to conduct content analysis, first interviews were transcribed, then the preliminary reviews after getting each interview done so that areas that had been overlooked in the interview could be identified and prompt the researcher to allow time to address these in future interviews. The initial themes and categories that the researcher saw in the data also informed the codes that could be used to analyze the obtained data systematically.

The second step was to organize the data. However, some parts of the data could be easily separated since interviewees answered some specific questions; there also existed some parts in the data which were woven through the interview; this resulted from the fact that the nature of the interview conducted in the present research was constructive and the interlocutors built their own conversation. In this case, the whole interview had to be analyzed for common themes, categories, and patterns.

Thirdly, coding was conducted, a process for categorizing the data, which consisted of developing a set of codes using both codes, which were predefined by the author and ones that emerged from the data. After that, the data was reviewed and coded. The last step was looking for similarities and differences in different sets of data and checking what different teachers were stating.

## 4. Results

### 4.1 Exploring the first research question

The first null-hypothesis stated that there was not any significant relationship between EFL teachers' professional identity and their implementation of critical pedagogy. A Pearson correlation was run to probe any significant relationship between EFL teachers' professional identity and their implementation of critical pedagogy in order to probe the first null-hypothesis. Based on the results displayed in Table 4.4, ( $r(119) = .82$ , representing a large effect size,  $p = .000$ ) indicated that there was a significant relationship between the two variables. Thus, the first null-hypothesis was rejected.

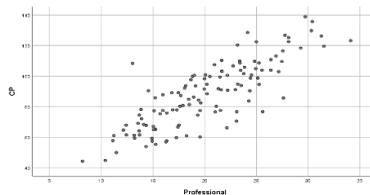
**Table 2.**

*Pearson Correlation between Critical Pedagogy and Professional Identity*

|          |                 | Critical<br>Pedagogy |
|----------|-----------------|----------------------|
| Professi | Pearson         | .824**               |
| onal     | Correlation     |                      |
| Identity | Sig. (2-tailed) | .000                 |
|          | N               | 121                  |

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

As it was noted earlier, the assumptions of linearity and homoscedasticity should be checked. These assumptions were explored through Scatter Plot (Figure 1). Since the spread of dots fell along the diagonal and did not form any rising-and-falling patterns, it can be concluded that the assumption of linearity was retained. The two variables also enjoyed homogenous variances. The spread of dots did not form a funnel shape, i.e., narrow at one end and broad at the other.



*Figure 1. Relationship between critical pedagogy and professional identity*

#### 4.2 Exploring the second research question

The second null-hypothesis stated that there was not any significant relationship between EFL teachers' institutional identity and their implementation of critical pedagogy. A Pearson correlation was run to probe any significant relationship between EFL teachers' institutional identity and their implementation of critical pedagogy in order to probe the first null-hypothesis. Based on the results displayed in Table 4.5, ( $r(119) = .916$ , representing a large effect size,  $p = .000$ ) indicated that there was a significant relationship between the two variables. Thus, the second null-hypothesis was rejected.

**Table 3.**

*Pearson Correlation between Critical Pedagogy and Institutional Identity*

|                        | Critical Pedagogy   |        |
|------------------------|---------------------|--------|
|                        | Pearson Correlation | .916** |
| Institutional Identity | Sig. (2-tailed)     | .000   |
|                        | N                   | 121    |

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

As it was noted earlier, the assumptions of linearity and homoscedasticity should be checked. These assumptions were explored through Scatter Plot 4.2. Since the spread of dots fell along the diagonal and did not form any rising-and-falling patterns, it can be concluded that the assumption of linearity was retained. The two variables also enjoyed homogenous variances. The spread of dots did not form a funnel shape (i.e., narrow at one end and wide at the other).

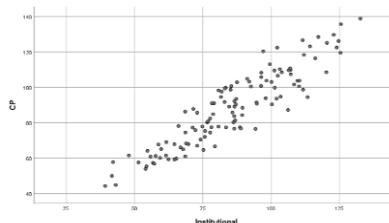


Figure 2. *Relationship between critical pedagogy and institutional identity*

### 4.3 Exploring the third research question

The third null-hypothesis stated that there was not any significant difference between EFL teachers' institutional and professional identities in predicting their implementation of critical pedagogy. This hypothesis can be explored using two methods.

First, as displayed in Table 2 and Table 3, professional and institutional identities had correlations of .824 and .916 with critical pedagogy. If these Pearson correlations are squared, it can be concluded that professional and institutional identities can predict .678 and .839 percent of critical pedagogy. These two percentages can be compared for any significant differences. Based on the results displayed in Table 4.6, ( $t(240) = 2.128, p = .034$ ), it can be concluded that there was a significant difference between the EFL teachers' institutional and professional identities in predicting their implementation of critical pedagogy. Institutional identity was a significantly better predictor of critical pedagogy. Thus, the third null-hypothesis was also rejected.

The second method achieves the same objective through linear regression. Two separate linear regressions can be run to predict critical pedagogy through professional identity (Table 5) and institutional identity (Table 6).

**Table 5.**

*Model Summary; Predicting Critical Pedagogy through Professional Identity*

| Model | R                 | R Square | Adjusted R Square | Std. Error of the Estimate |
|-------|-------------------|----------|-------------------|----------------------------|
| 1     | .824 <sup>a</sup> | .679     | .676              | 12.216                     |

\*\*a. Predictors: (Constant), Professional

As displayed in Table 5, professional identity had a correlation of .824 with critical pedagogy. In other words, it predicted 67.8 percent of critical pedagogy ( $R = .824, R^2 = .678$ ).

**Table 6.**

*Model Summary; Predicting Critical Pedagogy through Institutional Identity*

| Model | R                 | R Square | Adjusted R Square | Std. Error of the Estimate |
|-------|-------------------|----------|-------------------|----------------------------|
| 1     | .916 <sup>a</sup> | .839     | .838              | 8.647                      |

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As displayed in Table 6, institutional identity had a correlation of .916 with critical pedagogy. In other words, it predicted 83.9 percent of critical pedagogy ( $R = .916$ ,  $R^2 = .839$ ). These two percentages can then be compared using the procedure discussed above.

#### 4.4 Qualitative phase

The top eight teachers who gained the highest scores and the three teachers who gained the lowest scores on the three questionnaires were interviewed to check whether these teachers, with high and low professional and institutional identity, act in a way that they are expected to.

##### 4.4.1 Interview with teachers with the highest scores

Sixteen themes were revealed from the data, which had been reduced to fourteen codes. The codes, which indicated the different activities for practicing critical pedagogy in the classroom through EFL teachers, were divided into four general groups, codes associated with *developing critical thinking in the students*, *involving students and the curriculum and material development*, *empowering the students in the classroom*, and related activities performed by teachers. Most of the codes mentioned are related to implementing critical pedagogy since they are the codes that were correlated to critical pedagogy in the related literature and previous research.

As Vandrick (1995) explains, rather than building a society with inequities and absorbing students into it, critical pedagogy urges education to empower students to free themselves from those injustices and dominations. According to Izadinia (2009), years ago, teachers were regarded as absolute authorities whose responsibility was only transferring curriculum materials to students, and students were recipients of the knowledge. Scharle and Szabo (2000) state that teachers are not the only authorities and knowledge deliverers in the classroom and learners are not mere listeners. Conscientization is one of the principles of critical pedagogy, as Freire (2000,

p.15) puts it as "representing the development of the awakening of critical awareness." Pennycook (1999) believes in the formation of "conscientizations" through education. He clarifies the "conscientizations" by adding that "it is empowering the knowledge and resources of groups by facilitating a learning process that becomes critical, transitive and dialogical consciousness, and then potentiality of liberation" (Pennycook, 1999, p.35). argues that students can take its advantage by becoming aware of their social situations and problems and challenging the embedded beliefs in current predominant educational systems. Freire (1998) believes that performing ongoing evaluations of the students and the educational program is highly important, and it is an inseparable part of a critical adult education program.

In an educational model proposed by Freire (1970), according to this model, learners produce and evaluate their own learning materials, and they are involved in decision-making processes, resulting in the improvement of their decision-making abilities outside the classroom. Shor (1992) maintains that students set purposes concerning their needs, and teachers and students would constantly discuss these objectives and the advancement made toward obtaining them.

Ohara, Safe, and Crookes (2000) believe that the lesson plan based on critical pedagogy should include authentic materials so that they can represent the culture that will be examined and debated by the students, materials such as TV, commercials, and videos. Also, Degener (2001) highlights the importance of using students' experiences and the realities of their lives in creating curricular materials.

#### 4.4.2 Interview with teachers with low scores

After performing the interview and content analysis with teachers who gained the lowest scores, it turned out that the number of themes and codes related to activities for implementing critical pedagogy which was revealed

from the interviews, was significantly lower than the themes revealed from the interview with those teachers who gained the highest scores. Seven codes could be extracted, whose frequency was considerably low.

#### 4.4.3 Summary of qualitative phase

To sum up, what has been discussed about the obtained results of content analysis on the relationship between teachers' professional and institutional identity and their implementation of critical pedagogy, it can be proposed that the teachers with high professional and institutional identity were well aware of the principles of critical pedagogy, and they attempted to implement them in their classes. In contrast, teachers with low professional and institutional identities did not show enthusiasm for applying critical pedagogy in their classes and did not make special efforts to promote it in their classes.

### 5. Discussion

The first research question considered the teachers' professional identity and its relationship with their implementation of critical pedagogy. The related null hypothesis was rejected, as was indicated in the data analysis section. It turned out that there was a significant relationship between teachers' professional identity and their implementation of critical pedagogy. Based on the outcome of this study, it can be claimed that the way that teachers perceive themselves, their profession, and the context in which they have interaction can influence their pedagogical practices and preferences. In this research, it was found that the teachers with a higher sense and perception of professional identity are more likely to practice critical pedagogy principles. This finding is in line with those of Richter et al. (2021) and Renee (2013), all of which conclude that teachers' professional identity is a determining factor regarding teachers' pedagogical practice, preference and performance. It is also worth noting that Beijaard et al. (2000) state that the reason why the teachers' professional identity could predict their

pedagogical practices in teaching skills of interpreting and relating might be their teaching context. Similarly, this statement is in line with the current study's findings, which state that the professional and institutional identity of the teachers can be a determining factor of their pedagogical preference, namely critical pedagogy.

The second research question examined the relationship between EFL teachers' institutional identity and their implementation of critical pedagogy. For investigating any relationships, the Pearson correlation coefficient was run, the result indicating that there was a significant relationship between these two variables. The findings of this research illustrate that the way teachers identify themselves concerning their educational context and their sense of belongingness to their organization can play a role in their practicing the principles of critical pedagogy in their classes. The findings of the present study in this regard are in agreement with those of Ghafar Samar et al. (2011) and Puglia (2008), who conclude that teachers' institutional identity can both positively and adversely affect teachers' pedagogical performance and style. Moreover, the results are aligned with those of Soodmand Afshar and Moradifar (2020), who reported that institutional sense of belonging could strongly predict EFL teachers' job performance.

The third research question investigated the prediction of the dependent variable (EFL teachers' implementation of critical pedagogy) through the independent variables (EFL teachers' professional identity and EFL teachers' institutional identity). For exploring this research question, multiple regression statistical analysis was run, and the results suggested that institutional identity as one of the independent variables of this study is a significantly better predictor of implementing critical pedagogy through the EFL teachers. Consequently, the related hypothesis was rejected. This finding of the research might be indicative of the fact that the way teachers define

themselves in relation to the educational setting in which they are working, the beliefs, attitudes, sense of belongingness, and the responsibility they have toward it might be more effective than their sense of professional identity in implementation of critical pedagogy. In other words, the way teachers interpret themselves regarding their occupation is more effective in employing critical pedagogy principles.

Although the amalgamation of teachers' professional identity and teachers' institutional identity with the dependent variable of implementing critical pedagogy was very new, and no study in the current literature matched the findings directly, the findings of this study can be seen in line with Knowles (1992) point of view who claims that the way teachers perceive themselves and create images of themselves can determine the way they teach and their attitudes towards educational changes. Furthermore, the findings of the current study are indirectly congruent with Mead's (1934) claim, which states that the way an individual monitors his or her actions is determined through his interaction with the environment, and this is the path through which identity develops.

## **6. Conclusion**

Critical pedagogy seems to offer different opportunities for changes in the educational system and implementation in the classroom. It can contribute to the quality of teaching and learning in the classroom. Critical pedagogy, as a post-method approach, has proven itself to be a reasonably effective approach in different fields like teacher training (Bartolome, 2004; Bercaw & Stooksberry, 2004; Keesing-Styles, 2003) and learning-teaching (Schapiro, 2003). Likewise, applying critical pedagogy principles in the field of foreign and second language teaching by using its issues, dialogue, discussion, and expressions of students' ideas in EFL classes can develop their speaking skills and lead to transformational activities.

Based on the results of this study, which suggest that teachers with a higher sense of professional and institutional identity tend to employ the principle of critical pedagogy more often than those who have a lower sense of professional and institutional identity, teacher training centers, teacher educators and language schools are recommended to underscore the importance of making the teachers aware of their professional and institutional identities. This can be achieved by maximizing the chances and providing them with the paths to work out who they are as teachers, what goals they are pursuing, and what they want to achieve by being a teacher and teaching a foreign language. Teacher education programs and teacher training centers usually emphasize the importance of acquiring the foreign language and methodologies in teacher training courses, while it is of great importance to support teachers in their perceptions of their teaching both professionally and institutionally, because it impacts their pedagogical practices. The more teachers can be informed of the identity components, the better they can introduce themselves as teachers. They should provide teachers with professional development activities that can affect their perspectives and practices at different stages of their development.

This study hopes to shed some light on this important and sophisticated issue and to enhance interest in further research in the fields of teacher identity and critical pedagogy. In this study, for measuring the data, surveys were used as data-gathering instruments, and in forthcoming studies, researchers could make use of other data-gathering devices such as observation and self-narrative methods.

In this study, only a limited number of variables were scrutinized. The relationship between EFL teachers' professional and institutional identity and their implementation of critical pedagogy can be investigated in terms of other variables such as gender, age, and teaching experience. Also, this study

can be done in different contexts, such as high schools, universities, and language institutes, and their results can be compared accordingly. Besides, this study can be replicated with a more significant number of participants to specify whether the correlation will hold steady for a larger sample size.

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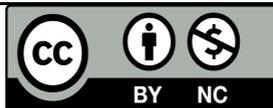
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