



Promoting Students' Agency through Critical Pedagogy: Middle School EFL Teacher Trainees' Perceptions

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Abstract— Critical pedagogy's implications on education are still discussed and debated, especially in our contemporary world, which is marked by technological advancement that plays a significantly remarkable role in shaping today's world. In this world, academic achievement should be correlated with critical consciousness so that future graduates can function well in our globalized world in which socioeconomic dominance and exclusion are increasingly encountered. Hence, instrumental and technical training is not the only aspect that education should harness. On the contrary, schools are requested to use and adopt critical approaches when teaching students. Overemphasis on technical skills produces fragile students who cannot give back to their societies, and their tasks are limited to performing assigned robotic roles. Schools that adopt this teaching style are serving the needs of the job market solely. Students are the future population that will hold jobs as well as positions in society. Based on this, this paper's objective is to know middle school EFL teacher trainees' perceptions concerning the role of critical pedagogy in empowering students' agency. It seeks to know how critical pedagogy, as a change-oriented pedagogy, can help students become agents who defend just causes locally and internationally. The sample of this study consisted of 52 EFL female and male teacher trainees who filled out the questionnaire. Additionally, online interviews were held with two focus groups each group consisting of six participants. This study adopted qualitative and quantitative analysis methods. Thematic analysis was applied to interviews, while questionnaires were analyzed using the statistical package for social sciences (SPSS). The findings of this study reveal that Moroccan EFL teacher trainees agree that using critical pedagogy in EFL classes will be very useful due to its role in empowering students' critical consciousness and reflection skills. The findings also show that active agency is an important aspect that should be focused on in EFL classrooms. On the other hand, the results indicate that critical pedagogy is seen as an asset as it contributes to equality in EFL classes and hinders social disparity between students. This study implies that critical pedagogy and its principles are recommended to be implemented in Moroccan EFL classes because of their impact on activating students' desire to take initiatives in their societies and to be representative of just causes, which will, in turn, help the entire community.



Keywords— EFL teacher trainees, critical pedagogy, critical consciousness, critical reflection.

I. INTRODUCTION

In an ever-evolving world, education is no longer in need of technical and instrumental knowledge, but rather a type of education in which technical and critical skills are

integrated so that students can face the threats and challenges of the modern world. A world that is characterized by economic greed, social conflicts, and ubiquitous forms of oppression. Critical pedagogy seems to

be salvation as it emphasizes empowerment and social engagement to the extent that it transforms students from passive, receptive to proactive and participatory agents who refuse to slumber while forms of oppression are intensified.

Since the publication of the *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1975), critical pedagogy has been widely recommended to be used in classes due to its numerous assets, as it caters to inclusion and instills hope and freedom in the classroom. Through dialogic engagement, students engage with their mentors in the classroom, and hence they contribute to the construction of lessons and ultimately the construction of their reasoning, which will be embodied in their acts. Additionally, it is an anxiety-free approach as students collaborate with their teachers and consequently inhibition, oppression, and teachers' authority are no longer barriers in front of learning. Its emphasis on liberation, cooperation, and consciousness has gained it credit among educationalists and pedagogues. In the Moroccan context, more particularly, students are regarded as empty vessels to be spoon-fed by their teachers, who are seen as knowledgeable know-all (Ouhani & Hiba 2022). In this model of education, teachers are seen as the providers of knowledge and students are seen as crippled and limited creatures. Unfortunately, this model of education maintains a certain social and cultural hierarchy and entrenches the idea that students are powerless individuals whose opinions are not worth considering in the learning and teaching process. By the same token, Moroccan students are not encouraged to think out of the box, which is a 21st-century soft skill. Creativity, problem-solving, and innovative skills are ranked at the top for success in our current modern times. These skills can be harnessed and empowered if critical pedagogy is implemented in the classroom in a way that both teachers and students are contributing to the process of making knowledge.

II. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The technological revolution has made knowledge available and easily accessible. Hence, schools are requested to adapt to this change and adopt approaches that combine technical and civic aspects of knowledge. However, today's schools are driven by quantity, and emphasis is put on cramming students' minds with knowledge that targets exam purposes. The Moroccan context is not an exception to this. The teaching of English as a foreign language is done through exposing students to language rules. In other words, the focus is on accuracy and fluency. Despite this, students' acquisition of the language is not satisfactory. By doing this, teachers and decision makers are ignoring the broader concept of education and its relation to society. For instance, active

agency is an important aspect that should be hammered at schools and that students have to cherish and turn into action when they graduate. This self-centered system sees students as empty vessels who remain in need of teachers' intervention. Consequently, students are not trained to be proactive and independent as schools consider them to be intellectually limited individuals. This model of education overlooks the role that education can play in providing society with future agents who can give back to their societies and help them flourish.

In this regard, critical pedagogy seems to be the solution that can help ignite students' commitment and empower their consciousness of the importance of active agency. This is because critical pedagogy is known for its engaging principles and its focus on critical skills that are primordial in the contemporary world. Its transformative nature and its emphasis on collaborative learning make it very suitable in the modern world. The adoption of critical pedagogy can lead to (1) creating democratic learning environments, (2) helping students gain self-confidence, (3) boosting their level of commitment towards their societies, and (4) sensitizing them about the importance of taking the initiative in their societies.

III. OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

This study seeks to know Moroccan middle school EFL teacher trainees' perceptions and attitudes towards the incorporation of critical pedagogy in Moroccan EFL classes. In other words, it examines the assumption that critical pedagogy and its underlying principles are key elements for advancing students' critical skills, boosting their sense of belonging, and instilling the notion of community service.

IV. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This study seeks to answer the following questions:

- 1) What are Moroccan EFL middle school teacher trainees' perceptions concerning fostering students' agency?
- 2) What are Moroccan EFL middle school teacher trainees' perceptions concerning the incorporation of critical pedagogy in EFL classrooms to empower students' agency?
- 3) Do Moroccan EFL middle school teacher trainees think that there is a correlation between critical pedagogy and agency?

V. LITERATURE REVIEW

Critical pedagogy is no more than a teaching model for education. It is a humanitarian approach that combines learning and strengthening the personality of the

student as a future citizen. Paulo Freire, as the godfather of this approach, believes that education should not become a factor for dehumanizing students and depriving them of their identities and existence. In contrast, education should serve as a pillar that enacts change and ensures inclusion and justice so that society serves the needs of all its members, regardless of their social strata. Critical pedagogy, hence, transforms the classroom environment to a place where issues of power and race are challenged, and other social elements that impede learning, social prosperity, and coexistence in general.

Paulo Freire (1970) denounces the model of education that perceives students as deposits, empty vessels waiting for the intervention of the teachers who are put at the center. In other words, Freire (1970) opposes this model of education as it produces students who are weak and unable to think for themselves and their communities. Students in this model of education are marginalized and ostracized since the educational system considers them as limited and intellectually weak. This model of education does not encourage students to think out of the box and ends up producing students without identity and vision. To solve this problem, Paulo Freire calls for the adoption of critical pedagogy, which addresses questions of justice and equality. It embraces students' prior knowledge and acts based on that to empower their critical consciousness so that they become wary when confronted with critical situations. Through the problematization of information, the teacher who is adopting critical pedagogy trains students to subject any information to analysis and scrutiny. This develops their critical consciousness and helps them triumph academically, which is very crucial nowadays.

The oppressive authority of the teacher is rejected, and students develop that trust in their teachers, which helps them learn. Critical pedagogy is not a self-centered approach but rather an approach that emphasizes the participation of students in the making of the lesson. Paulo Freire (1975) urges educators to adopt emancipatory approaches to education to the extent that students are free to discuss what they want and what plagues their economic and social wellbeing. By doing this, schools become venues where the call for justice and freedom is strengthened and empowered, and education henceforth becomes a significant factor that unites. Teachers should contextualize knowledge so that it can be transmitted flexibly to students who will be eager to accept this knowledge if it is made comprehensive and it stems from their daily struggles. Teachers should not teach the content of the haves to people who are struggling against malaria and Ebola, for example. In contrast, teachers who happen to be in situations like the former should make this content appealing for students by making it start from their daily experiences.

Schools should operate in a way that forms of oppression are addressed through the involvement of all students who give their input. By doing this, the teacher becomes a contributor to creating justice and contributing to attempts that seek to end disparities in societies, which should be the supreme goal of education. In our modern society, students are confronted with different forms of injustice and oppression either in the real or virtual world. Thus, empowering their criticality is a pivotal thing that will help them filter out truth from misinformation. The purpose here is to provide society with balanced individuals who will supply the needs of society and equally fight for those who are marginalized. By the same token, students who are trained to cherish democracy and justice will become agents who represent and embody these elements in their daily experiences. Then, teachers will be killing two birds with one stone by teaching technical knowledge and entrenching justice and democracy.

Kinchelo (2012) points out that adopting critical pedagogy in classrooms is a must, especially in an era where students consume a lot of digital content, which is full of stereotypes and misinformation. It is the role of education to cater to these elements and adopt inclusive methods so that all individuals are given equal learning opportunities that match their needs and their backgrounds. Kincheloe's (2012) claim stems from the fact that students today are bombarded with a lot of content in written and oral forms, and most of the time this content is mixed with fallacies and misinformation. In this, critical consciousness is the salvation as it allows students to be alert and critical when analyzing information.

The transformative characteristics of critical pedagogy make it very suited for contemporary society. As is mentioned above, critical pedagogy engages the students and opens their eyes to social disparities, which will build their personalities and prepare them for future endeavors. Through their participation in class and their discussion with their classmates, students are trained to discuss elements of power and are taught to be independent in their reasoning and thinking. The acknowledgment of students' skills and competencies makes critical pedagogy a special theoretical framework that teachers can use to instill elements of active engagement and participation of students in their local communities.

Mezirow (1978) calls upon using education as a vehicle to promote change and enact democracy. His theory of transformative learning stems from his reading of Paulo Freire's *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Mezirow's (1978) thoughts gained recognition in the world of today, which is globalized and in which students are no longer in need of technical and instrumental knowledge that leaves them unable to follow the sociocultural changes that are

happening in the world, and in which the need for critical skills is a must. Transformative theory (1978) is grounded in the belief that learning should be made critical so that learners are trained to address structural social elements in their societies. Learning should not only revolve around a typical sort of knowledge, but it should go beyond this and tackle the social dimension of knowledge. In this regard, Mezirow (1978) sees schools as venues where students are transformed into participants whose views and stances are considered. Both Habermas (1981) and Mezirow (1978) urge teachers to transfer the classroom to a communicative arena where students learn from the experience of each other. Connecting classrooms to students' environment empowers their critical self-reflection, which fosters their self-esteem.

Translated to the Moroccan context, students nowadays are confronted with a lot of digital content, as we are living in the era of AI. In this era, teachers are required to harness students' critical skills and train them to be defenders of just causes if we want our communities to reach prosperity in which all people coexist regardless of their backgrounds. EFL teachers should adopt teaching philosophies that are driven towards activating students' critical and analytical skills and get rid of traditional methods that are obsolete and archaic. The combination of hard skills and critical skills is a must in our world today. Traditional teaching methods that prioritize memorization and repetition are doomed to failure, as students today are no longer interested in this form of education, which they consider that it does not meet their expectations.

Critical pedagogy's adoption in EFL classes is crucial nowadays because of its transformative effects. It enables students to link their classroom practices to the external world in which they live. It does not limit its impact on classroom settings; rather, it becomes the bridge that links classroom practices to the reality of the modern world. Monchinski (2010) claims that "critical pedagogies seek to help students and teachers' conscientization that can help foster political action outside the classroom, these pedagogies also seek to impart survival skills to students" (p.119). Students are social agents whose contribution to society is imperative. Hence, the responsibility of harnessing this contribution lies within schools, which should cater for this aspect and give it due importance.

Paulo Freire's model of dialogic conversation proves itself to be very relevant to the Moroccan context. Moroccan students, especially in rural areas suffer from exclusion, slow access to technology which impact their learning outcomes. Through engaging with these students on topics that stem from their daily realities, teachers will consequently help them develop that self-confidence which

helps them overcome their anxiety and start to voice their opinions. Critical pedagogy hence becomes a tool through which democracy is instilled in the classroom and by which students' bonds with their teachers are strengthened. Dewey (1998) rejects the idea of linking education to teaching formal content. Education should extend to further aspects such as social interaction, justice, and democracy. Monchinski (2010) claims that "education is how new members of a group are fitted to the group, the means by which the individual is fitted to the social" (p.91).

The Moroccan context is still impacted by the emphasis on quantity and excellence in exams. Critical pedagogy is still not gaining that recognition despite its plausible impacts on learners. This is confirmed by many studies that were conducted at the level of secondary and tertiary education. Ouhani and Hiba (2022) point out that the Moroccan educational system is unfortunately exam-oriented and depends on the parroting model in which students are considered as deposits. This model is obsolete and irrelevant in the modern world. Similarly, studies conducted by Amrous and Nejmaoui (2016) and Hellalet (2021) all prove the fact that critical thinking is still not incorporated in the tertiary education and instructions at this level target receptive skills and teach independence on teachers' positions. This model of education promotes intellectual laziness and produces students who lack critical skills that are primordial in our century.

Critical pedagogy in the Moroccan context has not been overlooked despite the attempts of reforms that the educational system has undergone. Even though there are official documents that call upon teachers to adopt Bloom's revised taxonomy (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001) in their classes, these attempts are most of the time confronted with hindrances. These hindrances include a lack of resources, overcrowding of classes, a lack of training in this area, and teachers' mindset. The observation of Moroccan EFL classes entails that there is an overemphasis on preparation for final exams, which are driven by scores, and which are instrumental per se. Nowadays, the main criterion for measuring success is not to what extent students are critically powerful but to what extent they will get higher marks in final exams, in which students are required to answer questions that are based on memory and drills.

Bendraou and Sakale (2024) note that the incorporation of critical pedagogy in education fosters the creation of democratic atmospheres in classrooms. Consequently, students' self-confidence and self-esteem are boosted, which impacts their willingness to learn and engage in learning activities with more productivity and eagerness. Furthermore, this incorporation consolidates students' sense of belonging as they feel that they are

included and they are in settings where they are valued and respected. Critical pedagogy urges teachers to design classroom activities that encourage students to indulge in interactions and debates with their peers, which strengthens their critical skills and drives them to develop intellectual independence. More importantly, this incorporation encourages students to be prepared to participate in democratic procedures that benefit their societies and ensure justice and equity.

Kincheloe (2012) and Giroux (2004) point out that critical pedagogy is grounded in the belief that teachers should not prioritize learning alone but rather encourage students to think outside the traditional reasoning spectrum, which often views them as thoughtless and inconsiderate individuals. Schools should not become centers where students' brains are filled with certain specific knowledge. In contrast, schools should be revolutionized and adopt teaching practices that give them chances to practice their creative and critical skills. This can happen when students are introduced to problems that require decision-making skills and a great deal of innovation and creativity. Through the problematization of education, Giroux (2004) believes that teachers provoke students' intellectual curiosity, which prods them to pose questions, and thus interactions move from teachers' centeredness to students dominating the discussion. This mode of interaction encourages students to regain their self-confidence and trust classroom settings in which the process of democratization starts to be established. This should be primarily the main focus of schools nowadays as John Dewey (1916) points out. Dewey considers democracy as the pillar of any educational operation, and hence it should be instilled in classrooms for enhancing learning.

In a nutshell, it is increasingly remarkable that critical pedagogy was not given the attention it deserves in the Moroccan academia. Despite some limited attempts and despite being covered in universities' syllabi, these attempts remain largely theoretical and fail to exploit the full potential of critical pedagogy. The numerous benefits that critical pedagogy can bring to the Moroccan educational system if implemented accordingly are overlooked and forgotten. This may be due to the lack of training on how to incorporate it in the Moroccan context. Another factor might be the political overload that teachers associate with critical pedagogy, which they consider as a liberation theory that seeks to prepare rebellious individuals. These misconceptions that Moroccan EFL teachers have about critical pedagogy hinder its implementation in the Moroccan education settings. This paper aims to fill the gap in this area and consider Moroccan middle school English as a Foreign Language (ELF) teacher trainees' views on the use of critical pedagogy to promote students' agency and

encourage them to give back to their communities after graduation.

VI. METHODOLOGY

6.1 Research Design

This study used a mixed-methods design, which is a combination of quantitative (numerical) and qualitative (descriptive) forms of data. The mixed-methods design allowed the researcher to obtain in-depth data that helped answer the research questions. Bridging the gap between qualitative and quantitative data helped enrich the data and offered more perspectives that would not be possible if the study relied on one mode of data. This design is adopted in this study because it also provides a holistic understanding of the topic under investigation. Creswell (2015) argues that "the use of both quantitative and qualitative methods, in combination, provides a better understanding of the research problem and questions than either method by itself" (p. 537).

The reason for choosing a mixed-methods design is that the merging of both quantitative and qualitative data will make the findings more valid and authentic. Using qualitative and quantitative data alone might provide biased or incomplete data. Therefore, this study shifted to this design, which will help generate various data that provides a better understanding of the topic. Creswell (2015) maintains that "these types of data, together, provide a better understanding of your research problem than either type by itself. Mixed methods research is a good design to use if you seek to build on the strengths of both quantitative and qualitative data" (p.537).

6.2 Study Sampling

The participants of this study were English middle school teacher trainees at the CRMEF Rabat. They were S1 students, and they belonged to the same group which is group 4. They are holders of BA in English studies, and they will have one year training to become EFL teachers.

As for the type of sampling, this study adopted convenience sampling because the participants were available since they were taught by the researcher. They were also willing to participate in this study. Creswell (2015) points out that in convenience sampling, "the researcher selects participants because they are willing and available to be studied" (p.144).

6.3 Study Instruments

6.3.1 The Questionnaire

Questionnaires are an efficient way to collect quantitative data. The survey questionnaire was given to 52 EFL middle school teachers. It is composed of open-ended questions in which the researcher asked the teacher trainees to elaborate more on the questions and closed-ended

questions in which respondents have to choose between yes or no. Additionally, the questionnaire encompassed Likert-scale statements strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree, and strongly disagree. The questionnaire was divided into three constructs. The first construct was related to background knowledge about critical pedagogy. The second construct revolved around active agency and education and finally the last construct was about the correlation between active agency and critical pedagogy.

Questionnaires are an efficient method to collect quantitative data, mainly when researchers target several people who cannot be contacted via interviews. They offer a holistic understanding of the topic and harvest a wide range of information which empowers the authenticity and reliability of the study. Efron and Ravid (2013) assert that "surveys can be used to gather a variety of information about people's opinions, perceptions, and attitudes, and in planning and evaluating programs (Fink, 2009). Surveys can also be used to identify and assess needs; document behaviors; summarize outcomes; assess opinions, attitudes, beliefs, and perceptions; and gather information" (p.107).

6.3.2 Online Interviews

Interviews are another method of collecting data by talking to people who are participating in the study. They allow the researcher to get succinct data that represents the raw materials of the study. In this study, online interviews were administered to two focus groups, each group included six participants. The adoption of online interviews stems from the fact that they save time and generate ready-made answers that don't need to be transcribed. The participants were chosen based on their willingness and their availability. The participants were asked questions about the adoption of critical pedagogy in Moroccan EFL classes and what benefits this would bring to the Moroccan EFL learners. Additionally, they were asked questions about the role that critical pedagogy play in igniting students' agency so that they enact change in their societies.

6.4 Data Analysis

The analysis of the data is one of the most important steps in research as it leads to the results which is the backbone of the study. In this study, we analyzed data differently. Qualitative and quantitative methods were used to interpret and analyze data.

The questionnaire was analyzed using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences and data was represented using charts. Open-ended questions within the questionnaire were analyzed qualitatively by highlighting repeated patterns and themes.

The interviews were analyzed by first categorizing the data and classifying it based on recurrent themes and concepts. Thematic analysis offers insightful details about the topic and generates rich data that was not possible to collect through another instrument. Before applying thematic analysis, the data was divided according to predetermined categories. Then, themes were looked for within each category and the synthesis and interpretation of these themes was applied to these categories.

6.5 Study Validity and Reliability

Validity refers to the credibility of the results of the study. In other words, validity means that the information and the implications of the study are credible and trustworthy. Researchers are requested to take this point into consideration when they embark on the journey of research. In this study, outcome validity was ensured since the researcher asked participants to provide their perceptions about the role of critical pedagogy in enacting agency. Process validity was also ensured using triangulation which refers to the use of more than one instrument. Theoretical validity was accomplished by integrating different perspectives and theories like transformative learning, critical consciousness, and agency. Democratic validity was ensured through giving the chance to the participants to give their opinions and ideas both in the questionnaire and in the interview. Catalytic validity was attained through the context that the researcher provided for participants by discussions and debates about race, ideology, culture, color, and class.

The internal consistency and reliability of the questionnaire are shown by the Cronbach's alpha coefficient test results, which are displayed in the table that follows:

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
0,70	7

VII. RESULTS

7.1 The Quantitative Data: The questionnaire

The participants who filled out the questionnaire are 52 EFL teacher trainees of the academic year of 2024-2025. As the table below shows, 38.5 percent of them are male while 61.5 percent are female. Most of the participants are BA holders with a percentage of 96.2 percent, while 3.8 percent are MA holders. Table 1 illustrates the gender of the participants, and table 2 represents their academic qualifications.

Table 1: Gender of the participants

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Male	20	38.5	38.5	38.5
	Female	32	61.5	61.5	100.0
	Total	52	100.0	100.0	

Table 2: Degrees of the participants

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	BA	50	96.2	96.2	96.2
	MA	2	3.8	3.8	100.0
	Total	52	100.0	100.0	

Before proceeding with other questions, the participants were asked a question about their familiarity with critical pedagogy as a teaching philosophy. The plurality of EFL teacher trainees is familiar with critical pedagogy. They represent 78.8 percent of the sample of the

study, which reflects that critical pedagogy is tackled in the Moroccan higher educational system. Only 21.2% seem to have never seen critical pedagogy before. Table 3 illustrates this:

Table 3: EFL teachers trainees' familiarity with critical pedagogy?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	41	78.8	78.8	78.8
	No	11	21.2	21.2	100.0
	Total	52	100.0	100.0	

After knowing EFL teacher trainees' opinions about critical pedagogy, they were asked a question about agency and whether schools should cater for this or not. Table 4 shows respondents' answers. It is demonstrated that

there is an overall agreement between Moroccan EFL middle school teacher trainees that schools should prioritize agency as shown below.

Table 4: Should EFL teachers cater to agency when teaching students?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	43	82.7	82.7	82.7
	No	9	17.3	17.3	100.0
	Total	52	100.0	100.0	

As is shown above, there is a consensus among the respondents that agency is crucial and therefore schools are requested to take this into account. These are future trainees who are going to transform this into action when they become actual teachers.

To know respondents' views about the importance of agency, they were asked to show their level of agreement with the statement, which indicates that agency is important for society's progress and development. It was noticeable that most of the respondents strongly agreed with this statement as Table 5 shows.

Table 5: Active agency is important for societies' development and stability.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Srongly Agree	41	78.8	78.8	78.8

	Agree	7	13.5	13.5	92.3
	Neutral	4	7.7	7.7	100.0
	Total	52	100.0	100.0	

The respondents were also asked to express their views about the role that critical pedagogy plays in strengthening students' critical consciousness and therefore

they turn into agents who seek change in their societies.

Table 6 shows respondents' level of agreement.

Table 6: The adoption of critical pedagogy in EFL classes will empower students' critical consciousness and encourage them to initiate change in their societies

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Agree	32	61.5	61.5	61.5
	Agree	16	30.8	30.8	92.3
	Neutral	4	7.7	7.7	100.0
	Total	52	100.0	100.0	

Another question sought to know EFL teachers' middle school trainees' opinions about the correlation between critical pedagogy and agency. The plurality of the respondents strongly agreed with the statements that critical

pedagogy transforms students to proactive agents who defend just causes and cherish democracy in their countries as it is shown in table 7.

Table 7: Critical pedagogy transforms students to proactive agents who will defend just causes and cherish democracy and equality

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Agree	46	88.5	88.5	88.5
	Agree	5	9.6	9.6	98.1
	Neutral	1	1.9	1.9	100.0
	Total	52	100.0	100.0	

Continuing the investigation, EFL teacher trainees were asked if it is a must to foster students' agency through critical pedagogy in 21st century. The statistics show that all

the participants opted for yes which entails that agency represents a crucial point that teachers should try to enact in 21st century.

Table 8: Fostering students' active agency through incorporating critical pedagogy in EFL classes is a must in 21st century

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	47	90.4	90.4	90.4
	No	5	9.6	9.6	100.0
	Total	52	100.0	100.0	

7.2: The qualitative Data

In this study, the qualitative data consisted of some open-ended questions in the questionnaire and questions in the interviews. The first question in both instruments was

about critical pedagogy since it is the theoretical framework of the current study. Participants were asked to cite the principles that underlie critical pedagogy and how it is different from other teaching theories. The table below is a synthesis of participants' recurrent themes.

What critical pedagogy is known for:	Principles that underlie critical pedagogy	Some examples of definitions of critical pedagogy by participants in both the questionnaire and the interviews
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. It's known for encouraging students to engage and think critically rather than just absorbing the educational content. It views education as making students contribute to challenge oppression and create a change in society. 2. Encouraging learners to be active and critical instead of accepting the information as it is. 3. It's an approach that aims at enabling the learners' awareness of their social and political environment. 4. Its focuses on education as a tool for social change. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Transformative learning 2. Dialogic conversation 3. Critical reflection, critical thinking, critical consciousness, problem posing 4. Empowerment 5. Action 6. Praxis 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Critical pedagogy is an educational approach that encourages students to question societal inequalities and empowers them to challenge and change oppressive systems. 2. Critical pedagogy is an educational approach that emphasizes the development of critical thinking, social awareness, and the empowerment of students to challenge and transform societal inequalities and power structures. 3. Critical pedagogy is about making education meaningful by encouraging students to think for themselves and question the world around them. It helps them recognize injustice, find their voice, and believe that learning can empower them to make a difference in their communities.

The findings show that there is a thorough understanding of critical pedagogy and its underlying methods among Moroccan EFL teacher trainees. They all put forward the argument that critical pedagogy is a change-oriented pedagogy, and its incorporation is crucial since it leads to empowerment which is very useful for students as future agents. This also shows that the participants were introduced to critical pedagogy throughout their academic journeys, which was also proved by the closed-end and Likert scale questions in the questionnaire.

The interviews encompassed some questions that target participants' general background about critical

pedagogy. On one hand, the participants were asked to provide their opinions on questions that call for the adoption of critical pedagogy in the Moroccan context. Such questions were: do you think that critical pedagogy should be incorporated in Moroccan schools? What benefits will this incorporation bring to Moroccan schools? On the other hand, other questions revolved around using critical pedagogy as an approach to empower students' critical thinking and consequently turning them into active agents. The table below sums up the respondents' answers based on recurrent themes in their provided answers.

Summary of EFL middle school teacher trainees' opinions regarding the incorporation of CP	Benefits of CP	EFL middle school teacher trainees' opinions about the correlation between CP and active agency
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - It helps students develop critical thinking, creativity, and strong communication skills, making language learning more meaningful and relevant to their real world. - Critical pedagogy transforms language learning into an opportunity for cultural exchange and critical inquiry. It helps students see that language isn't just a set of rules to follow—it's a tool to understand and question the world around them. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Critical pedagogy develops students' critical thinking skills. - It teaches to question what their teachers teach them. - It empowers their critical consciousness. - It creates an atmosphere where students feel valued and safe to express their opinions and ideas. - It encourages active engagement and participation. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Critical pedagogy equips students with the skills and mindset needed to recognize injustice and act. - By fostering discussions on power, justice, and democracy, critical pedagogy helps students understand the impact of social structures on their lives, it encourages them to participate in democratic practices such as debates, collaborative decision-making, and community engagement.

- Integrating critical pedagogy into EFL lessons is essential because language acquisition is more than just grammar and vocabulary; it is also about understanding and engaging with various cultures, perspectives, and power dynamics. Critical pedagogy enables students to effectively use language as a tool for social change and self-expression, which is especially important in today's globalized society.	- It teaches students to draw a link between what they study in class and their environments.	- CP empowers them to speak up for what's right and motivates them to take action on social issues. This prepares them to become defenders of justice and make a real impact in society. -CP teaches students to question injustice, think independently, and take informed action to promote fairness and equality in their communities.
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VIII. DISCUSSION

This study aimed to investigate Moroccan EFL middle school teacher trainees' perceptions of using critical pedagogy as an approach to foster students' agency. It was remarkable that critical pedagogy is a known teaching philosophy for Moroccan teachers. Most of them view it as a useful approach that empowers students' critical thinking and critical consciousness, which are key elements for success nowadays. Teachers' familiarity with critical pedagogy will certainly ease its implementation, which will bring about plausible benefits for students. The study's findings reveal that cooperative learning, reflection, and taking actions are assets that critical pedagogy has. What is significant in this study is that there is a consensus among Moroccan EFL middle school teachers towards implementing critical pedagogy in EFL classes. They believe that critical pedagogy is a transformative theory because of its emphasis on empowerment, cooperation, and linking classrooms to environments in which students live.

In this study, it was strikingly noticeable that Moroccan EFL teacher trainees consider critical pedagogy as a holistic approach that caters for students' social and professional skills. Its combination of these skills makes it a suitable teaching approach in the modern world where the need for aware and proactive citizens is a must. In this study, critical pedagogy gained popularity among Moroccan EFL middle schools' teachers who are willing to embrace its thoughts in the classrooms. The results affirmed that critical pedagogy is seen as a compatible approach for teaching English on one hand. On the other hand, it is seen as a change-oriented approach which has impacts that cross technical and instrumental aspects of education to broader and more social needs of society.

In the same way, this study found that agency is a primordial element that education should cater for. The participants were convinced that education should prepare students who will be able to give back to their communities and participate in their progress. This participation means

that they will be able to take action against any form of oppression and injustice. Advancing this through education will surely contribute to the creation of societies that are socially and economically just and suitable for everyone. Ensuring this lies within the job of schools whose mission should not be confined to teaching arithmetic and basic skills of writing and reading but rather to bridging the gap between what takes place in society and schools. By agency, we mean that students will be aware of their role in their societies in which they should be involved and proactive. This awareness involves taking actions against any form of injustice and exclusion which can take place anytime and anywhere. Entrenching this through education empowers societies and strengthens the bonds between their members.

Moroccan EFL middle school teachers are convinced that adopting critical pedagogy is very beneficial for Moroccan EFL learners. Their answers to the Likert scale questions clearly show that they are convinced that critical pedagogy empowers students' critical consciousness and consequently encourages them to take actions in their societies. Acting means that they will be able to cherish democracy and defend just causes. The qualitative data also show that critical pedagogy is known for being student-centered, granting freedom to learners and encouraging them to think outside the box. According to Moroccan EFL middle school teachers, critical pedagogy has some elements that make it pedagogically different. These elements include thinking critically, challenging forms of injustice, and denouncing oppression. Critical pedagogy becomes a tool to initiate change in societies and therefore contributes to the development of communities, which is the ultimate goal of education as a whole. Through dialogic conversation, meaningful learning, and critical analysis of elements of power, students become aware and conscious of the importance of contributing in decision-making and change initiating.

In this globalized world, critical consciousness becomes a must. The only way to realize this is true the

implementation of critical pedagogy. Moroccan EFL middle school views entail that education should not be about teaching core knowledge. Au contraire, it should surpass this to foster students' critical skills, which have a greater impact on society as a whole. One of these impacts is that students become conscious citizens who are ready to act whenever there is a need in their society. They become defenders of just causes and preachers of democratic procedures. This would not happen if education did not appeal to awakening students' critical consciousness. Moroccan EFL middle school teachers claim that there is a close relationship between incorporating critical pedagogy and students' agency. According to them, critical pedagogy combines knowledge and life skills. It instills in students the habit of subjecting information to critical analysis and accepting only the knowledge that correlates with their daily practices. By this, schools create venues for learning and for discussing students' life hurdles, which creates an atmosphere of acceptance and inclusion. This also creates a learning environment in which students are valued, and their views are acknowledged, which boosts their self-esteem and encourages them to love school and trust it.

Agency is an important soft skill in the 21st century. Today's students are tomorrow's citizens who will be in charge of jobs and responsibilities. Thus, empowering their sense of belonging and strengthening their feeling of initiating change is given to schools, which are presupposed to take this into account. The study found that 90.4 of the respondents found fostering students' agency through critical pedagogy is a must. They are convinced that schools have to cater for this, especially in our modern world, where the need for preparing such students is a must. In the past, it was intrinsic within societies. Today, our world is full of misinformation, and education should sensitize students about this and draw their attention to forms of injustice and exclusion.

Another strikingly important finding in this study is the correlation between critical pedagogy and agency. Moroccan EFL teachers believe that critical pedagogy is an approach that emphasizes enacting change and calls upon teachers to give priority to this in their teaching practices. By talking about elements of power, injustice, and exclusion, teachers equip students with the necessary skills that urge students later to call for democratic change. Critical pedagogy midwives education with awareness raising, which helps students observe elements of misuse of power and hence prepares counter-mechanisms that allow all members of society to receive equal treatment and due respect. Education would be meaningless if it fails to provide society with conscious citizens who are willing to contribute to their society's progress and prosperity.

Moroccan EFL middle school teacher trainees are convinced that incorporating critical pedagogy is necessary in our modern times. This incorporation will benefit modern learners as it transforms them to collaborative agents who participate in decision-making. This habit will foster their self-esteem and train them to get used to decision-making and problem-solving skills that are of primordial importance nowadays. This collaboration between the students and the teacher and between the students themselves is what critical pedagogy is known for. Cultivating the habit of responsibility and engagement is surely achievable through the implementation of teaching practices that are based on critical pedagogy's principles. Hence, before adulthood, students are trained to be ready to develop the bond that links them to their societies. This creates homogeneous communities and ensures social coexistence, which are key elements for successful communities. Moroccan EFL middle school teacher trainees' insistence on the embracement of critical pedagogy principles in the Moroccan classrooms is a shred of evidence that clearly entails the benefits of this teaching approach that matches the needs of the Moroccan students.

IX. CONCLUSION

This study provides insightful information about Moroccan EFL teacher trainees' perceptions regarding the correlation between critical pedagogy and agency. It was remarkable that critical pedagogy as a liberation theory is not new in the Moroccan context, as most of the teacher trainees who participated in this study confirmed their awareness of this approach. More than that, Moroccan EFL middle school teacher trainees approved their readiness to implement critical pedagogy in their prospective classes, which is clear-cut evidence of the pedagogical and educational gains that critical pedagogy offers. Its insistence on inclusion, its emphasis on stress-free educational environments, and its call to raise students' consciousness are factors that account for it being recommended by Moroccan EFL middle school teachers to be incorporated in the Moroccan context.

Critical pedagogy is educationally different. It ensures inclusion, empowers students' critical consciousness, and guides students to be independent, especially in the world of today in which cases of oppression and exclusion are ubiquitous. It uniquely allows students to draw a link between their daily life experiences and their classroom practices, which results in students being aware of their function in society. This is exclusively limited to critical pedagogy and its underlying principles, which, if implemented correctly and creatively, will boost students' academic achievement and their agency and involvement in social matters. Furthermore, critical

pedagogy's benefits don't stop at the academic level, but it transcends them to strengthen the bond between students and their teachers, which augments students' productivity in class and unites them to work for a common goal. By having these characteristics, critical pedagogy imposes itself in the classroom settings as a congruent teaching approach that will bring about many changes and positively impact the learning skills and widen the bond that students have with their societies.

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