

EMPOWERING MARGINALIZED LEARNERS THROUGH CRITICAL PEDAGOGY: LEARNER AUTONOMY AND READING SKILL IN FOCUS

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Abstract

Applying guidelines of critical pedagogy, characterized as a 'crucial construct in challenging the inequalities' (Jennings & Lynn, 2005, p.15), in students educational development process equips learners with the critical reasoning power to challenge the current social, historical, and economical status of their society. One of the most important dimensions in which the implications of critical pedagogy can be attested is students' reading skill. The current paper aims at discovering if CP can give rise to the improvements in students' reading skill and consequently, qualitatively speaking, their autonomy. To this end four marginalized Iranian highschool students with almost the same level of language proficiency were selected on the sample of the study. The sample was chosen from a school of students with physical disabilities. As for the procedure, the attempt was made to socio-culturally transform marginalized students through dialectic discussions, based on Top-notch movies. The current study had a mixed design. In the quantitative phase, participants' post reading scores were compared to their pre reading scores. The reading passages were chosen from the bank of national high school exams; therefore their reliability and validity indexes had already been confirmed. For better understanding the effectiveness of CP, in the qualitative phase, the learner autonomy questionnaire was adopted from Zhang and Li (2004) in order to dig into minds of the participants. The results of the study indicated that learners, in real sense, were empowered in both reading comprehension scores and their level of autonomy. The findings of the current study can inform English practitioners, material developers, and language testers.

Keywords: critical pedagogy, learner autonomy, reading skill, marginalized learners, socio-cultural transformation