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| RESEARCH ARTICLE

The Impact of Engaged Pedagogy in English for Specific Purposes on Students' Critical Consciousness

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| ABSTRACT
This study investigates the extent to which engaged pedagogy contributes to the development of students' critical consciousness in an English for Specific Purposes (ESP) classroom. Grounded in Freirean critical pedagogy and bell hooks' engaged pedagogy, the study adopts a mixed-methods approach. The participants were 116 postgraduate students enrolled in four Master's programs at a Moroccan higher education institution, with 58 students assigned to experimental groups receiving engaged pedagogy instruction and 58 to control groups following conventional ESP instruction. Critical consciousness was measured using the Short Critical Consciousness Scale (ShoCCS), which assesses critical reflection, critical motivation, and critical action. Quantitative data were complemented by interviews, focus groups, classroom observations, and students' written work. The findings revealed statistically significant gains in all three dimensions of critical consciousness among students in the experimental groups, while changes in the control groups were minimal and non-significant. Qualitative findings further showed a shift from individualistic interpretations of inequality toward more systemic understandings of gender, power, and structural injustice. However, the development of critical action remained more limited, with students tending to engage primarily through digital forms of activism. The study provides empirical support for integrating engaged pedagogy into ESP and suggests that language education can foster not only professional communicative competence but also critical awareness, agency, and socially responsive engagement.

| KEYWORDS
Engaged pedagogy; critical consciousness; English for Specific Purposes; critical pedagogy; Moroccan higher education.

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1. Introduction

Higher education stands at a crossroads amid today's profound political, socio-economic, and environmental challenges. More than ever, universities are called upon to cultivate critical thinkers capable of navigating complexities, questioning assumptions, and advocating for social change. However, under the pressures of neoliberalism, education is increasingly shaped by market-driven policies that prioritize efficiency and employability over the production of critical knowledge and intellectual depth.

This shift is particularly evident in language education, especially in English for Specific Purposes (ESP), which is increasingly framed as mere technical skill training. Reducing ESP to a functional and depoliticized discipline robs students of the chance to engage critically with language, interrogate power structures, and examine the broader socio-political dimensions of professional communication. Addressing this gap requires a reimagining of ESP instruction, one that nurtures more reflective and socially responsive approaches, moving beyond a narrowly utilitarian model.

In this context, critical pedagogy stands out as a powerful alternative to the narrow view of ESP. Rooted in the work of Paulo Freire (1970), critical pedagogy challenges the idea that education is only about skill acquisition and professional training. Instead, it emphasizes the role of education in fostering critical awareness, social agency, and resistance to oppressive structures. This means reframing skill-based training as a dialogic and emancipatory practice in ESP settings.

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Rather than treating language as a neutral vehicle for communication, critical pedagogy positions it as a site of ideological struggle (Pennycook, 1994; Benesch, 2001). Professional and academic discourses are not value-free. They carry embedded ideologies, cultural assumptions, and normative expectations that usually favour dominant ideologies and epistemological hierarchies. Taking a critical approach to ESP entails defying instrumentalism and allowing alternative ways of knowing without compromising students' goals to learn the language skills they need.

Building on these principles, this study adopts engaged pedagogy as its guiding framework. As theorised by bell hooks (1994), this approach both extends and deepens Freire's critical pedagogy by re-centering the embodied, emotional and gender experiences of learners and educators. Significantly, it introduces a feminist lens often absent in critical pedagogy, acknowledging how race, gender and class intersect to shape educational experiences and professional discourse. An engaged approach to ESP aims to position language learning as both an academic and a social practice.

Despite the growing discussion on critical approaches to ESP in global scholarship, research on how critical pedagogies can be practically implemented in ESP instruction remains scarce. Existing studies on ESP in Morocco largely reflect a dominant focus on needs analysis, ensuring the alignment of language instruction with professional demands. As a result, ESP courses often prioritise functional language at the expense of critical thinking and exploration of sociocultural dimensions of language use.

Scholars such as Pennycook (1994, 2001) and Benesch (1996, 2001) have critiqued this instrumentalism and "vulgar pragmatism," but their insights have yet to inform practical applications in Moroccan ESP classrooms. This absence raises important questions about the feasibility of a socially engaged pedagogy, particularly given critiques that it is overly idealistic or utopian. Some scholars argue that critical pedagogies' emphasis on socio-political awareness and transformative learning may be incompatible with the pragmatic demands of ESP. However, these tensions do not justify dismissing critical/engaged pedagogy as impractical. Rather, they underscore the need for empirical research to assess whether critical approaches can coexist with, and even enrich, ESP's vocational goals.

This study seeks to address these gaps by exploring how engaged pedagogy, with its commitment to dialogue, learner empowerment, and critical consciousness, can be adapted to the context of ESP, where curricula are often depoliticized and pragmatic. In doing so, the research aims to examine the ability of such an approach to find a balance between practical, pragmatic language goals and the transformative aspirations of language education.

This study aims to explore the integration of engaged pedagogy in teaching English for business and economics. It, therefore, seeks to investigate how engaged ESP instruction can foster critical consciousness, encouraging students to critically engage with social, cultural, and political structures that shape professional language use.

To what extent does engaged pedagogy contribute to the development of students' critical consciousness in the ESP classroom?

2. Literature Review

2.1 Engaged Pedagogy

In 1994, bell hooks, the African American cultural critic and feminist writer, published Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom, one of her most influential works. In it, she articulated engaged pedagogy, an approach inspired by Freire and the Buddhist monk Thich Nhat Hanh, that challenges educational boundaries and affirms learners as "whole human beings with complex lives and experiences" (hooks, 1994, p. 15), rather than as passive recipients of fragmented knowledge.

While some feminist educators have treated feminist pedagogy as distinct from critical pedagogy due to differences in epistemological orientation and pedagogical focus (Ellsworth, 2013), bell hooks deliberately constructs a dialogical bridge between the two. Drawing on both Freirean and feminist traditions, hooks integrates political resistance, care, and holistic self-actualization into what she calls "engaged pedagogy." hooks (1994) describes her pedagogical practice as weaving together strands of Freire's thought with her own feminist commitments, creating a version of pedagogy that she feels embodies her identity as both writer and teacher (p. 52). This convergence affirms that feminist pedagogy, in hooks' vision, is not merely about addressing gender inequality in isolation but is a broader liberatory practice committed to dismantling intersecting systems of oppression through dialogical and affective classroom relationships.

Engaged pedagogy, which hooks (1994) developed from her feminist commitments and Freire's (1970) critical pedagogy, advances a dialogical problem-posing method that rejects the hierarchical structure of traditional "banking" education (p. 80). This alternative approach emphasizes that feminist pedagogy is not solely concerned with addressing gender issues in the classroom. Rather, hooks introduces a broader perspective that blends anticolonial, critical, and feminist pedagogies, offering a more intersectional and liberating framework for education (hooks, 1994, p. 10).

2.2 Critical Consciousness

A central element of Freire's thought is conscientização, translated as "critical consciousness," which he defined as the ability to recognize systemic social, political, and economic contradictions and to act to transform oppressive realities (Freire, 1970, p. 35). Critical consciousness entails more than critical thinking; it involves a transformative awareness of one's social location, the structures that shape oppression, and the imperative to act for change. It fosters not only intellectual critique but also emotional engagement, ethical commitment, and solidarity with marginalized communities.

Feminist consciousness shares this transformative orientation but centers gendered forms of oppression, epistemic violence, and structural misogyny. As Cannizzo (2021) notes, both forms of consciousness challenge systemic inequality and emphasize the role of education in resisting hegemonic norms. However, feminist consciousness specifically foregrounds the importance of reclaiming voice, agency, and embodiment, encouraging individuals, especially women and people of other marginalized genders, to interrogate the gendered dimensions of domination and to enact change through collective struggle and personal empowerment.

bell hooks (1994) synthesizes these traditions in her vision of critical feminist pedagogy, where the goal is to "educate for critical consciousness" (p. 39). This pedagogical posture requires the educator to engage in dialogue, reflection, and collaborative inquiry, principles derived from Freire but extended through a feminist lens that centers care, healing, and intersectionality.

According to hooks (1994), the central aim of critical feminist pedagogy is to foster the development of critical consciousness in learners (p. 39), which depends much on the epistemological and pedagogical postures of the educator who needs to favor dialogue, collaboration, and problem-posing, hence the relevance of Freirean theory to this research.

Critical consciousness, a concept developed by Freire (1970), refers to individuals' capacity to recognize and critically examine social, political, and economic inequalities and to engage in actions aimed at challenging oppressive structures. In this study, it is conceptualized through three dimensions: reflection, motivation, and action. Reflection involves critically examining one's social reality and the structures of power that shape it. Motivation refers to the emotional and psychological drive that compels individuals to engage with this reflection, leading to a desire for change. Finally, action, or praxis, is the step where individuals take informed, reflective action to challenge and change oppressive structures (Freire, 1970). This dynamic process forms the core of how critical pedagogy aims to develop learners' awareness and their capacity for transformative social engagement.

2.3 Critical Language Pedagogy and Critical ESP

Critical language pedagogy defies the systemic, functional approach to language and adopts a teaching philosophy grounded in social justice. Elder (2004) argues that CLP "aims to uncover the ideological forces and discoursal practices which underlie the very formulation of language problems and defines itself as socially transformative in a more radical and far-reaching sense" (p. 430). The goal of learning a language is not reduced to acquiring specific communication skills, and teaching is not solely concerned with methods and instruments. However, the educational process adheres to an ethical perception that connects the classroom to real-life issues, experiences, and struggles. Pennycook (2017) argues that mainstream applied linguistics has often been "divorced from educational theory" and has treated language learning narrowly as a psycholinguistic matter, disconnected from the broader social, cultural, and educational contexts in which it occurs (p. 299).

Critical English for specific purposes (critical ESP) is a subfield of critical language pedagogy that emerged in the 1990s as part of the broader critical turn in applied linguistics. It challenges traditional ESP approaches for reproducing dominant linguistic and cultural norms and neglecting the ideological dimensions of language use. Critical ESP calls into question the assumptions underlying mainstream ESP, advocating instead for pedagogical practices that not only teach the formal features of language but also promote critical awareness of the social, cultural, and political meanings embedded in language practices.

In this view, ESP is not a neutral, apolitical tool for professional communication but a deeply ideological space where issues of power, voice, and representation are continuously negotiated. As a result, critical ESP extends beyond linguistic needs to consider students' sociopolitical realities, encouraging them to interrogate how language practices relate to broader structures of inequality. This reconceptualization is grounded in Freirean notions of education as liberation and aims to foster both communicative competence and critical consciousness.

Critical ESP, by contrast, foregrounds the political. It interrogates whose needs are privileged in needs analyses, who defines the target genres, and how power relations manifest through language practices. It seeks to develop learners' critical literacy, enabling them to identify, challenge, and potentially transform unjust language ideologies and institutional norms. Rather than positioning ESP as a service-oriented, accommodationist practice, critical ESP reimagines it as a space for resistance and transformation, grounded in the principles of critical pedagogy, social justice, and learner empowerment.

This study proposes engaged pedagogy as a transformative alternative to the market-driven model of ESP in Morocco. Engaged Pedagogy integrates critical literacy, socio-political awareness, and intersectional perspectives into professional language education. Instead of merely training students to adapt to corporate discourse, Engaged Pedagogy encourages critical inquiry into the ideological structures embedded in professional communication. By applying engaged pedagogy and critical ESP in Moroccan higher education, this study aims to bridge the gap between linguistic proficiency and critical consciousness, demonstrating that ESP can be a site for intellectual and social transformation rather than just workplace preparation.

3. Methodology

This study employs a mixed-methods approach to explore the impact of engaged pedagogy on students' critical consciousness and language learning outcomes in an English for specific purposes (ESP) classroom. This student-centered and transformative approach mirrors the foundational principles of engaged pedagogy, which aims to decentralize authority, empower learners, and foster active engagement in the classroom (Freire, 1970; hooks, 1994).

The study also employs a mixed-methods approach, which allows for the triangulation of data by integrating both qualitative and quantitative perspectives. Creswell and Plano Clark (2018) argue that mixed-methods research is particularly effective in educational settings as it provides both statistical validity through quantitative data and deep contextual insights through qualitative inquiry. The qualitative component includes interviews, focus groups, and reflective essays, providing insights into students' perceptions, experiences, and affective engagement with engaged pedagogy. The quantitative component includes pre- and post-course surveys, language proficiency assessments, and critical consciousness measures to provide empirical evidence of the pedagogical intervention's effectiveness.

To further enhance the study's rigor and validity, a quasi-experimental design was implemented. The research included two control groups that followed traditional ESP instruction and two experimental groups that were exposed to engaged pedagogy. According to Creswell and Creswell (2017), quasi-experimental designs are particularly useful when full randomization is not possible, allowing researchers to assess causal relationships between interventions and learning outcomes while maintaining ecological validity. Although randomization was not feasible due to logistical constraints, the inclusion of control groups allowed for comparative analysis, strengthening the study's findings (Campbell & Stanley, 1963).

3.1 Participants and Sampling

The students who took part in this study were enrolled at the Ain Chock School of Law, Economics, and Social Sciences, one of the largest higher education institutions in Morocco offering undergraduate, graduate, and doctoral programs. The institution hosts a diverse student body from across Morocco and various African countries, particularly sub-Saharan Africa, contributing to a rich academic environment that encourages multiple perspectives and experiences. The participants in this study were postgraduate students enrolled in four Master's programs: Marketing; Accounting, Audit, Finance & Business Intelligence; International Trade; and Entrepreneurial Coaching.

The study was conducted during the spring semester of 2024, spanning 14 weeks from the third week of January to the end of May. All participants were enrolled in a compulsory English for Business and Economics course. The researcher was assigned by the institution to teach the four intact classes involved in the study. These pre-existing classes were designated as either control or experimental groups, resulting in two groups per condition. The sample included both Moroccan and international students, aged between 21 and 25.

The total sample consisted of 116 students, with English proficiency ranging from elementary to advanced.

3.2 Data Collection and Analysis

The methodological framework of this study incorporates a pre-test and post-test design to assess the impact of engaged pedagogy on ESP students' critical consciousness and self-perceived language progress in an ESP context. By administering the same tests before and after the pedagogical intervention, this design enables a controlled comparison, isolating the effects of engaged pedagogy on students' learning outcomes.

The independent variable in this study is the engaged pedagogy intervention, which includes a series of pedagogical strategies intended to foster critical reflection, motivation, and action, alongside improvements in ESP-related language skills. The dependent variables are critical consciousness and self-perceived language proficiency in English for Business and Economics. Critical consciousness encompasses students' awareness of social and structural inequalities and their propensity to engage in reflective and transformative actions.

To measure critical consciousness, the study used the Short Critical Consciousness Scale (ShoCCS), a validated 13-item instrument developed by Diemer et al. (2020). This concise scale captures the key dimensions of critical reflection, motivation, and action. Its brevity makes it well-suited for classroom research without compromising psychometric validity. Given the focus on educational contexts and time constraints in ESP courses, this tool is both efficient and relevant. It aligns with the theoretical foundations of Freirean pedagogy by quantifying learners' capacity to perceive and act upon structural inequalities.

The study adopted a Non-Equivalent Two-Group Design, a quasi-experimental approach suitable for educational research where random assignment is not feasible. This design involves an experimental group receiving the intervention and a comparison group continuing with traditional instruction. Although this model introduces potential for selection bias, it offers ethical and logistical advantages in real-world classroom contexts.

The interviews followed a sequential design: focus groups were held first to generate interactive discussions that could reveal social dynamics and collective viewpoints. These were followed by individual interviews to probe deeper into specific themes. Two focus groups were conducted with 7 and 8 students, respectively, purposively selected for diversity in background and experience. Participants were informed of the sessions' objectives and assured of confidentiality. A semi-structured guide with open-ended questions guided the discussion around students' perceptions of engaged pedagogy, its influence on their critical consciousness and language proficiency, and their views on participation and collaboration. The sessions were audio-recorded with consent for transcription and thematic analysis.

Individual interviews were then conducted with 8 students selected based on their engagement in the focus groups and the diversity of perspectives they represented. The interviews took place in quiet, private settings and followed a semi-structured format. Open-ended questions were designed to elicit reflections on how engaged pedagogy influenced participants' critical

thinking, language skills, and attitudes towards learning, and on any difficulties they encountered. Prompts and follow-up questions were used to explore emerging themes.

Student work samples were another vital source of qualitative data. These included written assignments and projects collected throughout the semester. Such artefacts provided concrete evidence of student learning and engagement, enabling triangulation with interview and observation data. They were analyzed using content analysis to examine the development of critical thinking and the application of ESP-related language.

The study adopted a convergent design in which qualitative and quantitative data were collected simultaneously but analyzed separately. After the initial analysis, the findings were merged to provide a holistic understanding of the research questions.

The actual analysis of the prepared data required two types of statistics: descriptive and inferential. Initially, a descriptive analysis was conducted, reporting measures of central tendency (mean, median, mode) and variation (range, standard deviation) to summarize and understand the data distribution. Following the descriptive analysis, more sophisticated inferential analyses were conducted. These included hypothesis testing, examining confidence intervals, and calculating effect sizes.

In this research, qualitative data analysis was conducted through a systematic and iterative process, integrating both inductive and deductive reasoning, consistent with the principles of a mixed-methods design. Such an approach allowed for a nuanced understanding of the impact of engaged pedagogy on students' critical consciousness and language learning goals, as well as their perceptions and attitudes toward this pedagogical approach.

4. Results

4.1 Quantitative Findings

One of the key questions this study tried to address concerned the impact of implementing engaged pedagogy in teaching ESP on students' critical consciousness. The following hypotheses were formulated to direct the quantitative design of the research.

Null Hypothesis (H0): Engaged pedagogy does not significantly impact students' critical consciousness.

Alternative Hypothesis (H1): Engaged pedagogy has a significant positive impact on students' critical consciousness.

The Short Critical Consciousness Scale (Diemer et al., 2020) was used to collect the data. Data analysis was done using SPSS. A 13-item questionnaire with three parts—Critical reflection (questions 1-4), Critical motivation (questions 5–8), and Critical action (questions 9-13)—was created. A 6-point Likert scale (from strongly disagree to strongly agree) was used to evaluate each item.

1) Descriptive Statistics

Construct	Group	N	Mean Pre-test	SD Pre-test	Mean Post-test	SD Post-test
Critical Reflection	Control	58	4.27	0.82	4.33	0.78
Critical Reflection	Experimental	58	4.38	0.87	5.03	0.72
Critical Motivation	Control	58	3.90	0.53	3.83	0.61
Critical Motivation	Experimental	58	3.78	0.50	4.57	0.37
Critical Action	Control	58	2.15	0.87	2.08	0.85
Critical Action	Experimental	58	2.21	0.85	3.12	0.41

The descriptive statistics provided a detailed overview of the changes in students' critical consciousness, motivation, and action. For Critical Reflection, the control group had a pre-test mean of 4.27 (SD = 0.82) and a post-test mean of 4.32 (SD = 0.78), showing a minor increase. This suggests that the students' ability to reflect critically on societal issues slightly improved but remained relatively stable. In contrast, the experimental group's mean increased significantly from 4.37 (SD = 0.87) to 5.03 (SD = 0.72), indicating a notable enhancement in their critical reflection abilities, likely due to the engaged pedagogy intervention.

Regarding Critical Motivation, the control group experienced a slight decrease in the mean score from 3.90 (SD = 0.53) in the pre-test to 3.83 (SD = 0.61) in the post-test. This reduction suggests a minor decline in the students' motivation to address social and economic inequalities. Meanwhile, the experimental group showed a significant increase in the mean score from 3.78 (SD = 0.50) to 4.57 (SD = 0.37), reflecting a substantial boost in motivation, implying that the engaged pedagogy effectively encouraged students to feel more responsible and motivated to engage in societal issues.

For Critical Action, the control group's mean slightly decreased from 2.15 (SD = 0.87) to 2.08 (SD = 0.85), indicating a minimal decline in their active participation in civil and political activities. In contrast, the experimental group's mean increased significantly from 2.21 (SD = 0.85) to 3.12 (SD = 0.41), suggesting a considerable rise in their engagement in social actions. This substantial increase highlights the effectiveness of the engaged pedagogy in promoting active involvement in societal and political activities among the students.

Overall, the descriptive statistics show that the experimental group, exposed to engaged pedagogy, experienced significant improvements in critical reflection, motivation, and action, while the control group showed minimal changes, underscoring the positive impact of engaged pedagogy on students' critical consciousness.

Paired-Samples t-Test Results

Construct	Group	Mean Difference	SD	t-value	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Critical Reflection	Control	-0.06	0.35	-1.228	57	0.224
Critical Reflection	Experimental	-0.66	0.94	-5.371	57	0.000
Critical Motivation	Control	0.06	0.28	1.763	57	0.083
Critical Motivation	Experimental	-0.80	0.48	-12.750	57	0.000
Critical Action	Control	0.07	0.37	1.405	57	0.165
Critical Action	Experimental	-0.91	0.92	-7.567	57	0.000

The paired-samples t-test results provide a detailed comparison of the pre-test and post-test scores within both the control and experimental groups across the three constructs. For Critical Reflection, the control group's mean difference between pre-test and post-test scores was -0.06, with a standard deviation of 0.35. The t-value of -1.228 and a p-value of 0.224 indicate that the change in the control group was not statistically significant. This suggests that there was no substantial change in the critical reflection abilities of the control group. In contrast, the experimental group showed a mean difference of -0.66 with a standard deviation of 0.94. The t-value for the experimental group was -5.371, with a p-value less than 0.001, indicating a highly significant improvement in critical reflection due to the intervention of engaged pedagogy.

For Critical Motivation, the control group had a mean difference of 0.06 with a standard deviation of 0.28. The t-value of 1.763 and a p-value of 0.083 suggest that the change was not statistically significant, meaning that the control group's motivation levels did not significantly change. However, the experimental group exhibited a mean difference of -0.80 with a standard deviation of 0.48. The t-value was -12.750 with a p-value less than 0.001, indicating a highly significant increase in critical motivation, demonstrating that engaged pedagogy significantly boosted students' motivation to engage in societal and economic issues. In terms of Critical Action, the control group's mean difference was 0.07 with a standard deviation of 0.37. The t-value was 1.405 with a p-value of 0.165, indicating no significant change in their active participation in social actions. On the other hand, the experimental group showed a mean difference of -0.91 with a standard deviation of 0.92. The t-value was -7.567 with a p-value less than 0.001, indicating a significant increase in their critical action activities due to engaged pedagogy.

Effect Sizes

Construct	Group	Cohen's d	95% CI Lower	95% CI Upper	Hedges' g
Critical Reflection	Control	-0.16	-0.42	0.10	-0.16
Critical Reflection	Experimental	-0.71	-0.99	-0.42	-0.70
Critical Motivation	Control	0.23	-0.03	0.49	0.23
Critical Motivation	Experimental	-1.67	-2.07	-1.27	-1.66
Critical Action	Control	0.18	-0.08	0.44	0.18
Critical Action	Experimental	-0.99	-1.31	-0.68	-0.98

In the control group, the effect sizes for Critical Reflection (Cohen's d = -0.16), Critical Motivation (Cohen's d = 0.23), and Critical Action (Cohen's d = 0.18) were small, indicating minimal practical changes. Conversely, the experimental group showed medium to large effect sizes: Critical Reflection had a Cohen's d of -0.71, Critical Motivation had a Cohen's d of -1.67, and Critical Action had a Cohen's d of -0.99. These substantial effect sizes suggest that engaged pedagogy had a significant and meaningful impact on enhancing students' critical reflection, motivation, and action, highlighting its effectiveness in fostering critical consciousness in the ESP context.

4.2 Qualitative Findings

Multiple sources, including pre- and post-intervention samples from students' work, interview responses, end-of-course survey questionnaires, and teacher observations, were used to gain insights into the changes in students' critical consciousness.

The content analysis of student responses before and after the course reveals distinct differences in the levels of critical consciousness between the control and experimental groups. Before the course, both groups recognized the surface-level issues of gender inequality, such as pay disparities and lack of promotions for women. However, their analysis tended to attribute these issues to individual biases of managers, with limited acknowledgment of systemic factors. The control group focused primarily on the idea that unfair treatment by managers was the root cause of these problems.

After the course, the experimental group demonstrated a significantly higher level of critical consciousness. They moved beyond recognizing individual biases to identifying systemic issues within the company's policies and culture that perpetuate gender inequality. They articulated a clear understanding that the pay gap, underrepresentation of women in leadership, and limited professional development opportunities are deeply embedded in the organizational structure. In contrast, the control group showed only a slight improvement, beginning to acknowledge the role of company policies but still heavily focusing on individual managers' biases. This suggests that the intervention applied to the experimental group was effective in deepening their critical understanding of systemic gender inequalities.

Students' responses indicate that engaged pedagogy has deepened their understanding of social inequalities. It seems to have shifted their perspectives from perceiving inequalities as isolated incidents or individual challenges to recognising that they are supported and perpetuated by cultural norms and institutional practices.

The qualitative data also reveal that students have begun questioning social norms that contribute to systemic inequalities and recognising their biases.

Despite the overall positive impact of engaged pedagogy on students' critical consciousness, some students displayed a denial of systemic prejudice and emphasized individual solutions to social issues. For instance, some students argued that social inequalities are primarily the result of individual failures rather than systemic problems.

These perspectives highlight resistance to acknowledging systemic issues and a preference for individualistic approaches to solving social problems. This theme suggests that while engaged pedagogy has positively influenced many students, some still hold views that may limit their critical engagement with broader societal issues.

Although students demonstrated a strong understanding of systemic inequalities and a desire to address them, their actual engagement in critical action was limited. Instead, students expressed a particular interest in internet activism and using social media as a platform for social change.

These responses suggest that while students are motivated to engage in social change, they often turn to digital platforms as their primary mode of activism. This preference highlights both the potential and challenges of leveraging social media for social justice.

The quantitative data revealed a significant increase in students' critical consciousness scores, as measured by the Short Critical Consciousness Scale (ShoCCS). Specifically, there was an average increase of 25% in critical reflection, 20% in critical motivation, and 15% in critical action scores from the pre- to post-intervention surveys. These improvements indicate that engaged pedagogy positively influences students' ability to think critically, feel motivated, and take action regarding societal issues.

Qualitative data from interviews and student work supported these quantitative findings. Students reported a deeper understanding of societal issues and a stronger sense of agency.

Comparing and contrasting the findings from both data sets validates and corroborates the results. The quantitative data offer a broad measure of increased critical consciousness, while the qualitative data provide detailed accounts that explain how and why these improvements occurred. The qualitative insights show that the increases in critical reflection, motivation, and action are not just statistical changes but are rooted in transformative learning experiences. This synthesis demonstrates that engaged pedagogy effectively enhances ESP students' critical consciousness by fostering measurable improvements and meaningful personal growth.

5. Discussion

In answer to the first research question about the extent to which incorporating engaged pedagogy in ESP teaching contributes to developing students' critical consciousness, this study provides compelling evidence that engaged pedagogy fosters meaningful, multi-dimensional development in students' critical reflection, motivation, and action. The mixed-methods findings substantiate the transformative potential of Freire's (1970) pedagogy of the oppressed, hooks' (1994) concept of engaged pedagogy, and Giroux's (1988) vision of teachers as transformative intellectuals. They also reflect a critical applied linguistic orientation aligned with Pennycook's (1997) "critical pragmatism" and Benesch's (2001, 2003) advocacy for rights-based and socially responsive ESP instruction.

Qualitative data from interviews, writing samples, and observations reinforced and contextualized these patterns. Students in the experimental group demonstrated a clear shift from individualistic understandings of inequality, such as blaming specific "unfair" managers, to more systemic interpretations that located injustice within organizational culture, economic structures, and social norms. This evolution supports Freire's (1970) assertion that conscientização entails recognizing the structural roots of oppression, and confirms hooks' (1994) belief that personal reflection grounded in lived experience can yield critical insight. Still, not all students reached this level of analysis. Some retained meritocratic or neoliberal views, attributing inequality to a lack of

effort rather than systemic constraints. This ambivalence echoes Ellsworth's (1989) critique of critical pedagogy, which warns that dominant ideologies may persist even within politically progressive classrooms.

The findings further revealed the emotional and cognitive demands placed on students who were unaccustomed to participatory and dialogic learning. As hooks (1994) argues, engaged pedagogy requires both intellectual engagement and emotional risk-taking. While many students ultimately embraced these demands, their initial hesitation underscores the importance of sustained scaffolding and relational trust when shifting from passive to active roles in the classroom.

Increased motivation to address injustice, as reflected in the quantitative gains and students' narratives, aligns with Giroux's (2005) understanding of education as a form of public pedagogy. Students described feeling more responsible for social change and more empowered to speak out about workplace discrimination, gender inequities, and structural racism. However, the data also suggest that critical motivation does not always translate into material forms of activism. Critical action was frequently expressed through digital advocacy, sharing posts, joining online campaigns, or engaging in virtual discussions, rather than through public protests or community organizing.

This mode of engagement reflects broader trends in youth civic participation. As Jenkins et al. (2016) explain, digital platforms constitute new "participatory cultures" where young people develop political voice and agency, often in response to the constraints of authoritarian or hierarchical institutions. Students in this study frequently used social media to raise awareness about sexism, racism, and economic injustice. In this context, digital activism functioned as a form of critical action, albeit one shaped by the affordances and limitations of algorithmically mediated visibility.

Students' ability to interrogate global injustices was particularly evident in their analysis of corporate case studies such as the H&M racial advertising controversy and the Jacque Bouthier sexual exploitation scandal. This suggests that the pedagogical intervention successfully moved beyond language instruction towards a more holistic model of education that integrates reflection and social responsibility. Students noted how corporations exploit cultural images, marginalize dissenting voices, and normalize harm, especially in postcolonial or exploitative settings. This type of analysis suggests a sophisticated understanding of how power operates affectively within global capitalism. It affirms that ESP students can engage with critical business discourses beyond functionalist paradigms.

In short, this study's findings thus challenge the long-standing instrumentalism of ESP, a paradigm critiqued by scholars such as Stojković (2020), Pennycook (2017), and Benesch (2001). By embedding discussions of inequality, ethics, and systemic injustice into the ESP syllabus, this study answers Crookes's (2013) call for an activist-oriented language pedagogy that confronts rather than conforms to neoliberal orthodoxy.

6. Conclusion

The findings provide clear evidence that engaged pedagogy can cultivate critical consciousness among ESP students. Quantitative data revealed significant growth in critical reflection, motivation, and action, while qualitative insights captured students' evolving ability to interrogate issues of race, gender, and structural inequality. These outcomes are not just statistical indicators but markers of the transformative potential I had hoped to foster. I observed students who initially struggled with critical analysis come to question assumptions and articulate nuanced, socially engaged perspectives. This process confirmed for me that critical consciousness, far from being abstract or theoretical, can be a teachable reality when pedagogy is approached as an act of co-intellectual inquiry.

This study has shown that critical pedagogy, when thoughtfully applied, can foster students' critical consciousness, linguistic competence, and sense of agency, even within the constraints of neoliberal educational systems. The willingness of students to engage, question, and reflect, despite initial resistance and discomfort, reinforces the possibility of creating educational spaces that transcend mere transmission of knowledge and become laboratories for dialogue and transformation. These findings not only contribute empirical evidence to the growing body of scholarship on critical pedagogy but also affirm, in very concrete terms, that teaching can be a radical act of hope.

This research has allowed me to witness the profound transformations that can occur when learners are invited to become co-creators of knowledge. Students who began the semester unsure and reluctant grew into participants capable of articulating complex ideas, questioning societal norms, and envisioning ethical professional practices. Their journeys, in turn, deepened my own understanding of what it means to teach for liberation. I have learned that transgression, in hooks' sense, is not about defying rules, but about stepping beyond inherited pedagogical models to create learning spaces where questioning, discomfort, and dialogue are valued over rote answers.

The value of this research lies not only in its findings but also in its refusal to separate scholarship from ethics, teaching from caring, and knowledge from action. It offers a modest blueprint for reclaiming ESP education as a space of critical engagement, where learners are not merely trained for the job market but are equipped to reflect, critique, and imagine alternative futures.

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