

## English Language Education as Practice of Freedom in Ghana: An Analysis of Teachers' Views and Opinions

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### ABSTRACT

This study examined the views and opinions of Senior High School (SHS) English language teachers on critical pedagogy as well as its applicability in their classrooms. To achieve these objectives, 220 teachers of English were sampled to respond to a questionnaire, with 50 out of this number selected to take part in an interview. The data were subjected to statistical analysis using the SPSS and thematic analysis by a simple system of coding. Results suggest that teachers consider critical pedagogy as a viable alternative to the traditional teaching practice. Based on the results, it is suggested that it is important for teachers to practice democracy in the English language classroom in order for students to see themselves as valued members of the society who can practice education as freedom.

### 1. Introduction

In Freirean *Critical Pedagogy*, the school is described as the most appropriate place where emancipation takes place, and this emancipation is supposed to be experienced by both teachers and students (hooks, 2004). However, in most instances, students do not necessarily experience or enjoy this emancipation, and many reasons account for this situation, with teachers usually being at the receiving end of the accusations. According to Burbules & Berk (1999),

Critical pedagogy is an effort to work within educational institutions and other media to raise questions about inequalities of power, about the false myths of opportunity and merit for many students, and about the way belief systems become internalized to the point where individuals and groups abandon the very aspiration to question or change their lot in life. (p. 50)

This view simply suggests that critical pedagogy, as an approach to teaching (including language teaching), enables individuals, teachers and students alike, to question existing structures and work towards transforming lives and the society as a whole. In relation to this, López-Gopar (2014) argues that critical pedagogy affords students the opportunity to discuss issues relating to discriminatory practices, social inequality, identity negotiation and power. Although it appears the language classroom is solely for the purposes of teaching language, Kubota (2014) is of the opinion that talking and teaching about controversial issues is unavoidable in English language teaching. This is because students have concerns and these concerns are connected to the larger societal issues such as social justice (Fleming & Morgan, 2011). Thus, the concerns of students can become the window through which controversial issues or topics are raised in the ESL classroom. This paper examines the views and opinions of Senior High School (SHS) English language teachers on critical pedagogy as well as its applicability in their classrooms. The rest of the paper is organized as follows: the next section discusses the teaching of the English language in Ghana and its relationship with critical pedagogy. The third section presents the conceptual framework adopted for the study, while the fourth section focuses on the procedure followed in the collection and analysis of data, with the discussion of results presented in the sixth section. The paper ends with pedagogical implications and a conclusion in the seventh section.

### 1.1 Critical pedagogy and English Language Teaching (ELT) in Ghana

At independence, the English language was chosen as the language of officialdom in Ghana. Its use is mainly seen in the school as the medium of instruction and as a subject for government business and international trade. In fact, it is the de facto national language as well as the lingua franca for the educated. Before independence, the British had trained some Gold Coast citizens to fill certain clerical posts and help advance the commercial pursuits of the British merchants and their administrators in the castles" (Adjaye, 2005, p. 7). Interestingly, the first batch of citizens to benefit from British education was trained in England and brought back to augment what was already in existence. Although other Europeans before the British arrived, the British started offering education on the Gold Coast, including the Castle Schools. This means that Ghana's education has largely followed the British system until successive governments introduced reforms. For instance, the 1980 reform focused on moving the system away from academics to the nation's manpower needs. Currently, Ghana operates a 3-6-3-3 format at the pre-tertiary level. This consists of three years of kindergarten, six years of primary and three years of junior high school education (nine years of basic education), and then three years of senior high school education. By and large, it can be argued that Ghana's educational system is a legacy of colonialization.

## 2. Conceptual framework

The conceptual framework underpinning the current study is adopted from Moorhouse (2014). According to him, three main thematic ideas encapsulate the very essence of the concept of critical pedagogy. These are giving students a voice, providing them with an education relevant to their lived experiences, and raising students' awareness of social injustice.

### 2.1 Giving students a voice

Ghana's kind of education inherited from the British is seen as exhibiting the *banking* system (Freire, 2000, p. 72), and language education is no exception. In this system, students are taken as dormant individuals who only come to school to be *lectured* to and expected to accept anything that is given to them. Such a system operates assuming that it is only the teacher who has all the knowledge to impart to students. Students are considered *depositories*, while teachers are the *depositors*. The depositors deposit knowledge into these depositories, just as individuals deposit money into a bank account that inactively receives the money. In essence, there is a direct flow of information from teacher to students (Mbodila & Muhandji, 2012). The students are mostly seen as empty vessels that need to be filled, without them playing an active role in the teaching and learning process, creating a one-way transaction between the teachers and students.

According to Freire, students can become critical thinkers if they create consciousness (or conscientização) through effective communication and dialogue. Mahyuddin et al. (2004) also argue that students develop critical thinking skills to become critical and creative learners to achieve language curriculum goals through critical consciousness. Pica (2000) believes that language learning and thinking skills are often treated as independent processes, leading to an alienation of students from their roles as agents of change. To avoid this alienation, Canagarajah (2005) believes that teachers can make students aware of their rights and abilities as social agents who can bring about the change that is desired in the larger society, as language teachers, including those in Ghana, have a great influence on language learning in their students (Lipman, 2003). Unfortunately, teachers do not appear to offer knowledge, debate, and dialogue to students (Giroux & Giroux, 2006), although critical thinking is a fundamental component of critical pedagogy (Freire, 2000).

The students eventually become citizens who lack critical thinking, that is, the ability to think and change their society. In this instance, Freire (2000, p. 2) argues that "the more students work at storing deposits entrusted to them, the less they develop the critical consciousness which would result from their intervention in the world as transformers of that world". For both teachers and students to influence and shape society, Freire suggests that education should be a problem-posing activity that focuses on *praxis*, a framework in which teachers practically apply the theories or concepts learned through education. In such a framework, students get the opportunity to see what they learn in the classroom and apply it to change the world. Through praxis, students reflect on the knowledge they have and think critically about how they can turn it into meaningful ideas through problem-posing and problem-solving, thereby making the process less alienated and more practical. In effect, praxis involves combining theory, reflection, and action to attain *freedom* in education.

In the opinion of hooks (2004), when students are given a voice, they practice what she calls *enabled pedagogy*, an approach within which teachers and students can freely share their experiences. Having a voice in class does not just mean given the opportunity to talk; it involves more than that. In fact, it calls on teachers to rethink and modify their teaching curriculum. In modifying the curriculum, teachers have to make adjustments to accommodate the views and input of students. The teacher should not be the 'Lord and Master' of the curriculum designing process, but rather, as Shor (1992) advocates, construct it to draw upon the cultural resources that their students bring with them to the school. By re-examining the curriculum and reconstructing it with students' input, teachers facilitate the change of role from being object to active, critical participants of the teaching and learning process.

This freedom that Ghanaian students need does not come easy, especially against the backdrop that students in most schools in Ghana are only expected to reproduce but not to engage the teacher and other colleagues in any dialogue. According to Freire, while banking education resists dialogue and treats students as objects of assistance, problem-posing education regards dialogue as indispensable to cognition, which unveils reality and makes students think critically. He further notes that problem-posing education bases itself on creativity and stimulates true reflection and action upon reality, thereby responding to the vocation of men as beings who are authentic only when engaged in inquiry and creative transformation. The banking system of education has several limitations due to its association with a one-way flow of information. Mhodila and Muhandji (2012) also note that teaching and learning become mainly theoretical rather than practical in the banking system. They further stress that it limits interaction, lacks creativity and has less integration.

Unlike the traditional approaches, critical pedagogy basically centres on creating a transformational culture in students. It offers a different approach in that it is aimed at changing students' opinion about the way they perceive social problems. This approach enables students to develop their speaking skills by focusing on real-life problems while at the same time understanding and diagnosing these problems. This way, they can be motivated to speak more since they can relate to the problems and talk about authentic issues, giving them insight into the nature, origin, and possible solutions to their problems. Applying this approach can make teaching sessions more enjoyable by focusing on what the students really need to talk about, letting them discuss their issues of interest, helping students progress critically and consequently enabling them to change the structure of their society. This process, no doubt, can lead to improved living conditions.

## **2.2 Providing relevant education**

In practising freedom in the language classroom, teachers need to provide the kind of education that is very relevant to the students' lived experiences. This consists of understanding the educational ideology of the country, making room for individual differences, and taking cognisance of diversity in cultural backgrounds. Other factors are our beliefs about what is good and what is bad and what is right and what is wrong. It is almost impossible to decouple politics and ideology from our educational system. This is because decisions about the school are highly political and almost every decision made in and about the school is linked to this political ideology.

Human beings are naturally individualistic; what may be appropriate for one may not necessarily be for another. Therefore, teachers are expected to treat everyone as an individual with their own peculiarities and interact with them according to their needs (Freire, 2000). To achieve this, teachers generate excitement in the classroom community deeply affected by an interest in every student and recognize their presence. To facilitate critical learning, hooks (1994) notes that teachers cannot simply teach but make sure that they acknowledge everyone's presence in the classroom. She appeals that this insistence should not be simply stated but demonstrated through pedagogical practices. Ghanaian teachers of English can simply do this by recognizing that every student has the potential to influence the lesson, and this influence comes in the form of contributions. Since these contributions are useful, they become resources for constructive use to enhance the class's capacity and create an open learning community.

Being empowered means that students find themselves in an environment where critical pedagogy is practiced, and have power in a setting where they did not previously exist. In almost all Ghanaian classrooms, students are asked to follow the rules without challenging the lines of authority. Most teachers and educators believe in the notion that students become disrespectful, arrogant, disobedient and rebellious when allowed to question the type of education they receive and how it is transmitted to them. Freire (2001) recognizes the tendency for teachers to offer the same level and content of [language] education to their students. He, therefore, argues that students should be provided with differentiated instruction, as not all students will benefit from a one-size-fits-all approach to teaching. Based on this, he intimates that it is unwise to make a one-size-fits-all recommendation.

## **2.3 Raising student awareness of social injustice**

Kanpol (1998) observes that the authoritarian nature of schools is guided by control mechanisms, standardized curriculum, rigid rule structures, and top-down hierarchy. Through the top-down hierarchy, the production of teaching textbooks is dictated by educational authorities. This is because teachers and students do not produce these textbooks, which are developed by people considered 'experts' without considering what students wish and do not wish to study. It is important to note that this same top-down process controls the educational system and so teachers need to be aware of the hidden curriculum and the hidden ideologies embedded in the contents of the books. With respect to the hidden curriculum and hidden ideologies, McLaren (2000) notes they prevent teachers from following their interests and creativity in the classroom because the economic and political system does not allow them to do so. Unfortunately, most publishers advise textbooks writers to follow guidelines to avoid including controversial topics (Akbari, 2008). This practice has brought in its wake politically and socially harmless anesthetized English coursebooks that appeal to an international audience (Gray, 2002) at the neglect of the people who really

need these books. In the language classroom, both teachers and students need to understand the relationship between language and society to help solve them.

One aspect the educational system promotes is inequality in the classroom and the larger society. This means that critical pedagogy practice aims to eradicate such marginalization and, in its place, promotes equity. For instance, Freire (1970) reveals that marginalized groups mainly lose their voice and identities and that regaining the voice and resisting unjust reproduction turn them into active agents for social change. Freire continues to stress that marginalized students should reflect on their concrete situations to find out why things are the way they are. Moreover, they have to be made aware of the factors contributing to their being marginalized. This also means that the teacher needs to be less assertive, and rather, take a step back and allow students to have their voice in generating and engaging in topics that may ordinarily be considered controversial.

In order to raise students' awareness of social injustice, they must be allowed to challenge the status quo, done through the offer of democracy. Although democracy is the people's government, by the people and for the people, it only begins and ends in political circles and slogans; it does not extend to schools in Ghana. According to Freire (2000), problem-posing education can only occur within egalitarian, respectful relations. In effect, Freire advocates for a system in which teachers replace the traditional teacher-student hierarchy with egalitarian interactions, one in which each other can express their opinions freely without any inhibitions or restrictions. Most language (and of course, all) teachers in Ghana fail to acknowledge that the more students feel oppressed or suppressed, the more stubborn they become, try to resist such tendencies, and these usually lead to revolts.

Challenging the status quo is not about being disobedient or disrespectful; it is about questioning what education is supposed to do to you - moulding you, giving you a voice, empowering you, and transforming you, as well as equipping you to transform your society. Most teachers are the people who think that the student's responsibility is to listen, receive and reproduce, and not to ask any questions that may put their lives in jeopardy. Unfortunately, this trend is most prevalent in high schools, where students are supposed to be helped develop their sense of worth, humanity, and ability to think critically. The teachers at this level do not make it a responsibility to train these students to develop these attributes and move up the educational ladder without questioning ideas and ideals. When they arrive at the university, they expect the teacher to *bank* them, just as they had experienced previously. This makes the university teacher's work difficult, as they, in trying to satisfy the students, also end up becoming *bankers*. The ultimate result of this unfortunate situation is that even university education becomes one of suppression, oppression and domination.

### **3 Methodology**

#### **3.1 Design and sample**

The methodological approach used in this paper is the mixed-method approach with a convergent parallel mixed method as the design. The design was chosen because it was necessary to collect the data concurrently not to miss any participant who was willing to participate in the follow-up interview after responding to the questionnaire as timing is crucial in such a design. Most importantly, the design was adopted due to the fact that it provided a better understanding of issues regarding the practice and challenges of critical pedagogy as an approach to teaching the English language. Since it was not possible to conduct the research with all the teachers of English in Ghana, a sample was selected to represent this population. The sample was selected from among 550 teachers of English selected from across all the regions of Ghana to attend a workshop. Out of this number, 220 teachers were selected for the study. While the 220 were randomly sampled to respond to a questionnaire, fifty (50) out of the 220 were conveniently sampled for an interview, and this is considered representative of teachers of the English language in Ghana.

#### **3.2 Instruments**

The main instruments used in the study are a questionnaire and an interview guide for the collection of data. The questionnaire was designed to solicit teachers' views and opinions on the applicability of critical pedagogy in the English language classroom in Ghana. The questionnaire was adopted from Tabatabaei (2013) and is deemed appropriate because it contains all the essential items that enabled us to collect data pertaining to English teachers' views and opinions on the application of CP in the Ghanaian context. The interview guide also contained questions on the application of CP. Although there were only 15 questions in the interview guide, follow-up questions helped to delve deeper into how teachers of English in Ghana view the application of this concept in their teaching.

#### **3.3 Data collection**

Participants were presented with the questionnaire to obtain their responses. The workshop lasted three (3) days; the questionnaire was given to them on day 2 and allowed to take home and brought on the third day. Because the approach is a concurrent mixed method one, the questionnaire had space where participants could indicate whether they wanted to take part in a follow-up interview or not. Of the 220, 50 indicated their willingness to take part in the interview. The interview followed

immediately after they submitted their questionnaire. With this, a time within the day was fixed for the interview. Each session lasted no more than 20 minutes as it was not intended to drag on for too long to not make the interviewees disinterested in the sessions. Each session was recorded separately with a DAT recorder for the orthographic transcription.

**3.4 Data analysis**

The data were subjected to both quantitative (statistical) and qualitative (thematic) analyses. For the quantitative analysis, the questionnaire was coded by a statistician and fed into the SPSS software for the statistical analysis. The analysis here was done according to themes based on the research questions to make it easier to identify and discuss. After all the raw data had been entered, statistical means and standard deviation values were obtained using the software. The recordings from the interview were transcribed orthographically, with themes identified from the transcripts. All the themes were grouped and coded according to the responses given. The results of the analyses are discussed in the next section.

**4. Results and discussions**

As already indicated, the results are presented under themes in line with the research questions. The first research sought to obtain information on teachers' views on the application of CP. Here, results suggest that teachers generally have a positive disposition about CP.

**4.1 Teachers' views on critical pedagogy**

As noted, this research sought to know the possibility of applying CP in their English language classroom, with the first research question focusing on the views of teachers on CP. In all, six (6) themes emanated from this questionnaire that helped to answer this question. Tables 1-6 and Figures 1-6 present statistical results on the themes.

**4.1.1 Views on language and ideology**

Table 1 presents responses gathered from the questionnaires on the place of ideology in the language classroom.

*Table 1. Responses on language and ideology in the classroom*

Item	N	Missing	Mean	SD
Language learning is a social process and it takes place as a result of social interaction	220	0	4.85	1.383
The school is an appropriate place for discussing language problems and issues	215	5	4.48	1.420
Language is an ideology, therefore, teaching a language is teaching a new ideology	219	1	3.96	1.364
There is a relationship between language, power, and ideology	213	7	4.69	1.071
In writing language textbooks, local values, beliefs, and interests must be taken into account	220	0	4.55	1.650

The teachers' views are in tandem with the principles of CP as they see the language classroom as a place for discussing language issues, imparting new ideologies and engaging in social interaction with their students (Kubota, 2014). The mean values suggest that the teachers agree to all the items. For example, the teachers consider the school a place where they can discuss problems and challenges confronting the teaching of language with their students. This point is supported by Teacher T01 who intimated that:

It is not that I go to class, teach and then go away. We all know the problems that students encounter in speaking and writing the English language. We need to talk about these problems so that our students would understand that when you study a language, you need to also know the problems associated with it. Some students struggle to speak only

English; therefore, they mix it with their first language. This can create a lot of problems for them if not addressed. This means that teachers are aware of their students' problems in learning language and are willing to make discussing such problems a habitual practice as part of their language teaching. Although the third item had teachers disagreeing (61), the raw percentage values suggest that more teachers agree (158) than disagree, with one teacher abstaining. With this response,

teachers believe that one needs to take note of what is and is not acceptable in language teaching. One teacher, T02 indicated that:

We have political, social, and economic ideologies in every nation that always find their way into teaching language.

This response suggests that language teaching involves getting students to appreciate and to be imbibed with the various political, social and economic ideas that serve as wheels on which various societies are driven. This assertion falls in line with that of Kumaravadivelu (2006) who argues that language teaching involves a critical practice that connects the word with the world and recognizes that language is an ideology and not just a system. For the fourth item, the level of agreement is so because the teachers believe that several political considerations are made with respect to the design of the language curriculum, the selection of textbooks to use, and the recruitment of teachers to implement the curriculum. These considerations include such things as what ideas would foster patriotism and nationalism in the students who are citizens and are therefore expected to contribute to national development.

Lastly, the teachers agreed that it is important for textbook writers to take into account the beliefs, values and interests of teachers and students in order for them to appreciate their local culture. For instance, Teacher T04 explained that the culture of a society in which language is learnt includes the people's aspirations. Thus, students need to be taught this culture during the language lesson. In this sense, hooks (1994) thinks that teachers should allow their students to make their school expectations clear. All these are done in order to nurture the students to become transformers of society.

#### 4.1.2 Views on educational equity

Table 2 shows the responses of teachers regarding educational equity in the English language classroom.

*Table 2. Responses on educational equity in the classroom*

Item	N	Missing	M	SD
Language teaching and learning is a political action and may lead to the violation of the rights of some particular group of people in the society	220	0	3.07	1.827
Teaching methods in the language classroom may lead to the creation and reinforcement of social inequalities	217	3	2.91	1.558
Gender differences may cause differences in language learners' way of learning	220	0	3.25	1.603
There should be a relation between students' abilities and leaning styles and the language teacher's teaching methods and techniques	220	0	5.10	1.049
Considering gender differences in language teaching is an essential issue	220	0	4.01	1.421

From Table 2, we see that the mean values for the first three items largely indicate disagreement with the statements posed. For instance, teachers do not agree with the assertion that language teaching and learning is a political action and may lead to the violation of the rights of some particular group of people in the society. This means that most of these teachers hold the view that language education cannot violate the rights of some of the students, even in the classroom. The majority who disagree claim that curriculum planning and development have nothing to do with the learner, although they recognize that the learner is the main person for whom the curriculum is prepared. To support their views, Teacher T06 said:

Ah, what has language got to do with politics at all? We just need the curriculum, syllabus, textbooks, and work starts. These documents are prepared for the student who sits and takes part in the process. No student's rights can be violated in my class.

On the contrary, others agree that this violation is possible because they believe that whatever subject one teaches or learns has the potential to result in the violation of their human rights. Hear Teacher T04:

I agree with this assertion. Language is political in the sense that it's the politicians who structure the input in the curriculum. What suits a particular political party is what is included in it. In Ghana, for example, there is no public school for autistic children which is discrimination.

These teachers believe that when curriculum planning and development do not include the teacher and the learner, their rights are violated since it leads to some amount of oppression. This is directly linked to Freire's idea of oppression which is re-echoed by Akbari (2008) that the same people who have the power to make decisions in the society are also those who can design and implement educational systems. To this end, the marginalised voices (such as students) are drowned, leading to powerlessness and oppression.

On items 2 and 3, the teachers disagreed that teaching methods tend to reinforce social inequalities among students while gender differences may cause differences in language learners' way of learning. In the interview, teacher T08 said:

If the appropriate methods are not administered to suit the needed/different learning styles, then I think it will reinforce social inequalities. This is further worsened by our current teaching of large class enrolment. Social inequalities exist.

This assertion proves that students' gender differences show in language learning and need to be taken into account. This finding supports Collins, Kenway, and McLeod (2000) who state that gender differences manifestly impact students' academic interests, needs, and achievements.

The teachers who agreed to item 4 on Table 2 believe that the ideal language class should be one in which teachers carefully consider the individual differences of their students in the selection of teaching methods. To buttress this, teacher T07 said:

There should be a relationship between them because no two children are the same. One learning style cannot be used to teach all the students in one class due to their different capabilities, genetic makeup, and family background. But this is not what pertains in the classroom.

This clearly shows that it is unwise for teachers to use a one-size-fits-all approach in preparing for and administering lessons in the language class. Rather, they can study the different capabilities and differences in the backgrounds of their students and apply different techniques in lesson delivery.

Finally, teachers agreed that considering gender differences in language teaching is an essential issue. Looking at the results for the third and fifth items, the teachers either do not understand the two items or are not certain about the role gender differences may play in the way learners learn the language. The point raised by teacher T07 fully captures this lack of awareness of some issues regarding equity in teaching. While the responses for the last two items agree with those of Alibakhshi (2011), those for the first three items suggest otherwise, creating a sharp contrast between the two sets. According to Alibakhshi (2011), if teachers take learners' personality type, attitudes, learning styles, and interests into consideration, language learning can occur smoothly and easily, while learners' achievements would be increased. In effect, the results for this theme suggest that language teachers may not fully understand the tenets of critical pedagogy, and may need specialized training in order for them to consider its application in the classroom.

**4.1.3 Teachers' views on learners' requirements and their heterogeneity**

One other area of critical pedagogy that the study focused on was the views of teachers on students' requirements and their heterogeneity. Responses to questions from the quantitative analysis that show these views are displayed in Table 3.

*Table 3. Responses on learners' requirements and their heterogeneity in the classroom*

<b>Item</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>Missing</b>	<b>M</b>	<b>SD</b>
Language textbooks contents must be based on the analysis of students' needs	220	0	4.03	1.715
Decisions about language teaching and learning in Ghana are made by the curriculum planners in a top-down process	219	1	4.57	1.226
If students are not satisfied with contents and way of teaching, the teacher must revise them	219	1	4.50	1.801
A language teacher's teaching method should be compatible with student's interests	220	0	4.78	1.358

Language teaching and learning may lead to a change in individual's culture and beliefs	217	3	4.13	1.654
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Table 3 shows that the teachers agreed to all the statements on learners' requirements and heterogeneity. For example, the teachers agreed that language textbook contents must be based on students' needs. If the textbooks are written with the students in mind and aimed at helping them to improve in the use of language, then they should be the primary focus in the choice of the topics for textbooks for them. This also means that teachers and curriculum planners must first determine what these needs are in collaboration with the students, rather than making decisions far removed from students' experiences (e.g. Akbari 2008).

The teachers also agreed that the curriculum planners make decisions about language teaching and learning in Ghana in a top-down process. Thus, there are no contributions from the students. This response is in line with Kanpol (1998) observation that the authoritarian nature of schools is guided by control mechanisms, standardised curriculum, rigid rule structures, and top-down hierarchy. The observation of Teacher T05 further authenticates this during the interview that:

Decisions are made in such a manner without broad consultation especially when it comes to the students. Their inputs are not considered. I think their input must be considered in preparing the syllabus to make it a bottom-up rather than a top-down approach.

This practice clearly defeats the practice of CP. However, considering the suggestion by teacher T05, he expresses optimism about the possibility of ensuring the practice of CP in this regard which will validate Kostogriz's (2002) educational view. This view calls for a literacy education beyond autocratic, top-down inculcation to include bottom-up harmonious assimilation into a community of practice.

Furthermore, the teachers agreed that if students are not satisfied with contents and teachers' way of teaching, the teachers must revise them. This assertion is good because unlike the universities where their students constantly appraise teachers, it is only heads of departments and heads of schools who appraise teachers in the senior high schools. Again, this agreement suggests that it is uncommon for students to show their satisfaction or otherwise for the teacher's content or methodology. This also means that it will be important for students' appraisal of teachers to be adopted in senior high schools in Ghana, or at least, teachers should give their students the opportunity to show their assessments of content and pedagogy.

Additionally, teachers indicated that their teaching method should be compatible with students' interests. This view is important because the more teachers' methods appeal to the interests of their students, the easier it is to get involved in teaching and learning. This view is shared by teacher T06 who stated that:

Although we don't have it in the syllabus, we teachers need to pay attention to the interests of our students because when we do that, we can easily capture them and get them to follow whatever are teaching. Other than that, we are bound to doing a one-man show.

From the teacher's remark, making teaching methods compatible with the interests of students is not a prescription in the syllabus. However, it behoves language teachers to study their individual classrooms, taking into account the various interests of their students in teaching so that their students will be interested in what they teach.

Finally, the teachers agree that language teaching and learning may change an individual's culture and beliefs. This shows that teaching and learning of language have the potential to transform students' beliefs and worldview by offering them news of thinking (Kincheloe, 2008). While teachers do this, they also minimize their influence on students so that they can think independently. Canagarajah (2008) and Pennycook (1989) observe that because English language education is ideological and political, it is socially constructed and represents the interests of certain groups who can make decisions. Thus, for language education to cause a change in students' beliefs and culture, Freire (1996) and Giroux (2011) opine that teachers must provoke students to move out of their comfort zone to expand their knowledge and understanding of the problems of language in the society and to work towards a transformed society.

#### 4.2 Application of critical pedagogy in teachers' lesson plan

The aim of this section was to find the extent to which teachers included CP in their lesson plans. Themes such as programme structure, learner development, and teacher-student relationship are discussed. On the whole, the findings revealed that the teachers apply the tenets of CP to some extent in the language classroom. From the results, it can be argued that teachers allow their students to take centre stage when they are planning what to teach them. Also, a look at the considerations teachers make for learner development suggests that they are sensitive to their students' needs and aspirations even as they connect what they



teach to the real lives, hopes, needs, and interests of their students to ensure their holistic development during the teaching of language. The results are presented as follows:

**4.2.1 Programme structure**

Here, the study focused on the incorporation of CP in the way they structure their language teaching programme. Responses to questions from the quantitative analysis are displayed in Table 4.

*Table 4. Responses on programme structure*

<b>Item</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>Missing</b>	<b>M</b>	<b>SD</b>
The language program tends to make students effective decision makers	217	3	4.58	1.215
In program planning, my students are involved	217	3	4.65	1.360
For teaching language skills, I try to relate topics in the syllabus to my students' social and cultural experiences	220	0	4.55	1.328
In my class, I just follow the goals and objectives of the language syllabus	218	2	3.84	1.584
In planning what to do in the classroom, I consider my students' expectations and immediate needs	220	0	4.79	1.083
The students' future needs and interests are considered for organizing my class agendas	220	0	5.07	1.077

From Table 4, we realize that teachers agree strongly with five (5) items with mean values ranging from 4.55 to 5.07 and disagree with one (1) item with a mean value of 3.84. With these, the results show that the English language programme in the SHS in Ghana is tailored to turn students into effective decision-makers capable of helping solve some of the language problems, especially in teaching in Ghana. The English language teaching and learning problems that Ghana faces are myriad, and it is believed that once students are taught to appreciate these problems, they will be in the position to help mitigate them. These sentiments were expressed by teachers in support when one of the teachers, T06 who remarked that:

Yes, they become effective decision-makers because it gives them the opportunity to learn both the language and culture of English, even as a second language. This knowledge would translate into understanding, which is needed more than ever in our educational system. You see, for as long as we decide to use English as the official language, we need more people to train and teach to the next generation.

For item 2, there is an indication that the teachers involve their students in planning the language programme. This is echoed by T04 who indicated that:

It is extremely important to engage your students, no matter their age. In fact, I involve my students in drawing the timetable for the class. This is done through their class reps. But when it comes to drawing the curriculum, I don't think the students are involved. Even the teachers are not involved. This smacks of discrimination.

This assertion means that most teachers (almost 80%) make a conscious effort to relate the topics they teach to the socio-cultural experiences of their students. This stance supports the admonition of Ooiwa-Yoshizawa (2012) that "the language classroom can be a place where students understand their own identities and their own society" (p. 23). Thus, for the school to help students, the topics in the curriculum or syllabus need to be local, rather than having what they may not relate to, for this is what Freire (1994) calls the pedagogy of hope.

For the fourth item, teachers disagreed that they just follow the goals and objectives of the language syllabus. This result actually suggests that a little over half of the teachers do not just go to class and strictly follow what has been prepared for them, but try to involve their students so that their needs, expectations, and interests can be met by the time they finish with the syllabus as can be seen in the mean values for items 5 (4.79) and 6 (5.07) respectively. This is confirmed by a teacher, T02, in the interview that:

It is true that we are expected to follow these laid-down objectives; however, you must also realize that you are dealing with human beings who have hopes and expectations. As such, you've to let them. I sometimes ask the students to talk about what they would expect from the syllabus, especially those in SHS 2 and 3. I sometimes ask them to read lessons to be learnt in the following week ahead of time. In so doing, they can have forehand information of what to expect, which helps them contribute effectively.

The response from the teacher is a clear indication that when language teachers go beyond just the objectives of the syllabus and take students' hopes, aspirations, needs, and expectations into consideration, students gain more from the language tend to benefit more than when they strictly follow what has been prescribed for them, although this is not easy to do. With this, Simon (1992) asserts that teachers must connect language teaching and learning to the objectives of educating students so as to understand the reason behind the way things are. Here, teachers also develop in students, critical consciousness to help them recognize reasons behind the facts (Aliakbari & Faraji, 2011).

#### 4.2.2 Teachers' consideration of learner development

With this theme, the objective was to understand teachers' views regarding their consideration of the development of the student in the course of planning and delivering their lessons. Teachers' responses indicate that they consider these issues in their classrooms. The responses from the teachers are presented in Table 5.

Table 5. Responses on consideration of learner development

Item	N	Missing	M	SD	A	D
My instruction and teaching materials seek to make students become critiques	220	0	3.95	1.376	66.36	33.63
In my class, I do not find enough time to learn about my students' hopes, needs and interests	220	0	3.80	1.779	63.63	36.36
I try to connect my language instruction to the real lives of my students	218	2	4.81	1.330	86.8	12.27
My curriculum is strictly formal, paying little attention to underlying values	220	0	3.31	1.648	41	59

As can be seen in Table 5, teachers' responses are skewed mainly towards a positive view, rather than a negative one. For example, on item 1, a mean value of 3.95 suggests that they prepare their teaching and learning materials to encourage students to become critiques. For those who agree, they consider it important to do so, as Teacher T014 said:

Yes, because I involve them in selecting the teaching materials, offer them the opportunity to read ahead before the main lesson, and allow them to ask questions that bother them. This gives them voice.

Teacher T014's response suggests that some teachers apply critical pedagogy in the classroom and hence give the students a voice in the happenings in the language classroom.

With mean value of 3.31, teachers disagreed with the statement, 'My curriculum is strictly formal, paying little attention to underlying values'. This response suggests that a little above half of the number of teachers agree that their curriculum is usually an informal one, proving that it allows for underlying values to be explored in the language class. One of the teachers, Teacher T011 remarked that:

It is not strictly formal because I sometimes go outside the syllabus to explain other areas that are not captured in the curriculum.

The response suggests that unlike some of the teachers whose teaching is controlled by the content of the curriculum and textbooks, this teacher and others go to the extra mile to include important issues that are outside the curriculum so as to make their students critical thinkers and cause them to undergo that transformational change that will further lead to a change in society.

With item 2, a mean value of 3.80 shows an agreement, meaning that teachers generally tend to focus more on the teaching than any other issues that have to do with the students' personal needs and aspirations. Here, we see that students cannot connect the language they are taught to their everyday needs, thereby alienating them from serving as agents of change (Pica,

2000). The teachers agreed with a mean value of 4.81 to the statement 'I try to connect my language instructions to the real lives of my students'. This is an indication that an overwhelming number (86.8%) of the teachers support this idea.

**4.2.3 Teacher-student relationship**

This theme was to understand teachers' views regarding the relationship between teachers and their students regarding the application of critical pedagogy in lessons. The responses from the teachers are presented in Table 6.

*Table 6. Responses on teacher-student relationship*

Item	N	Missing	M	SD	A	D
I am interested in learning new things from my students and sharing the responsibilities in class	220	0	4.64	1.664	84.5	15.5
In my class, my students are knowledge receivers and I am the knowledge transmitter	219	1	3.79	1.774	55.4	44.1
In class discussions, I do not allow students to express their opinions	220	0	3.00	1.858	41.8	58.2
My students obediently follow what I ask them to do in the classroom	220	0	3.80	1.717	69.5	30.4

Table 6 shows that the teachers agreed to three items with mean values of 4.64, 3.79, 3.80, and disagreed with one item with a mean value of 3.00. The responses to items 1 and 3 suggest that the teachers can be considered to be critical pedagogues because they do not dominate their class activities but give room for their students to collaborate with them. For example, the response to item 1 shows that the teachers are interested in learning new things from their students. They also showed a disagreement item 3 that do not allow their students to express their opinions. The disagreement goes to buttress the fact that the teachers practise critical pedagogy in their classrooms. Allowing all their students to express their opinions gives them a voice, making their classrooms largely democratic. While their students take their roles, they minimise the banking system of education in their classes. Again, by allowing all their students to express their opinions, they give them a voice, making their classrooms largely democratic.

A slightly higher number (55.4%) agreed that they are knowledge transmitters while their students are knowledge receivers. This shows that some teachers some teachers still dominate lessons and give very little place for students to spearhead teaching and learning activities. One of them, Teacher T09 said:

Not always. I am the one facilitating, so I should be the one to do the greater part of the talking. This is the only way I can achieve my objectives as a teacher.

This implies that teachers do not always decouple their teaching from traditional practices and embrace critical pedagogic teaching practices. Percentage-wise, 69.5% of them indicated that their students obediently follow what they ask them to do. It can thus be argued that some language teachers still believe that the traditional way of teaching yields better results. This also means that while some teachers tend to lean towards a practice of critical pedagogy, others still believe that learners should be taught using the banking system.

**5. Pedagogical implications**

The findings of the study have important implications for pedagogy in the Ghanaian educational system in general and in senior high schools in particular. First, teachers who fail to apply the principles of critical pedagogy in their lessons limit the ability of education to lead to transformation in the lives of students and society. These teachers must abandon traditional perceptions and practices and adopt critical pedagogical means in lesson preparation and delivery (McCarthy, 2015). Additionally, it is important that in preparation for teaching, the selection of schemes should consider topics of great value and importance to society and the individual. It is also meaningful to students since that can function as a strategy for the realization of critical pedagogy in the classroom. Moreover, the application of critical pedagogy is an issue that has to be examined with particular care.

Dialogue is essential to the implementation of critical pedagogy in the everyday classroom, as revealed by the study. Dialogue implies a mutual understanding between teachers and students. Thus, the willingness of the teacher to engage in dialogue with the students represents a mutual relationship between teacher and students (Sparrow, Sparrow & Swan, 2000). Finally, teachers must make efforts to overcome the challenges that limit their decision to apply the principles of critical pedagogy in their classrooms. Typically, teachers must ensure that they put in measures that facilitate adequate participation of all students in their lessons in spite of a large number of students in their classes. A lot of group work can be encouraged to ensure that every student gets the opportunity to share their views during lessons in the face of the limited class time.

## 6. Conclusion

The present study examined the views of teachers on the concept of critical pedagogy and its applicability in senior high schools in Ghana. The findings have shown that teachers perceive critical pedagogy as a good practice and fit for the language classroom. They showed this by agreeing with most of the positive statements and disagreeing with some of the negative ones. More so, the findings have shown that a number of teachers make serious attempts at applying critical pedagogy in their lessons by essentially considering the individual learner differences of their students. From the results, it is suggested that teachers have to create an exciting classroom atmosphere in which the classroom is treated as a community where every student is recognized and valued as an important member of this community. Teachers must also practise democracy by offering problem-posing education, one in which students get to know and understand school policies and decisions so that they will not find their own way of getting such information. Lastly, teachers must recognize the interplay of politics and education in their profession and, together with their students, identify and shape their beliefs, cultures, and assumptions to get the best out of what critical education offers them.

In order to practise education as freedom, Ghanaian teachers must recognize that the school does not and cannot exist without political influences. Unlike traditional education that decouples itself from politics, Darder (1991) notes that critical pedagogy views all education theory as intimately linked to ideologies shaped by power, politics, history, and culture. This means that schooling functions as the terrain of the ongoing struggle over what will be accepted as legitimate knowledge and culture. He thus argues that a teacher practising education as freedom must address the concept of cultural politics by “both legitimizing and challenging cultural experiences that comprise the histories and social realities that in turn comprise the forms and boundaries that give meaning to student lives” (Darder, 1991, p. 77). Most Ghanaian teachers mostly go into the classroom with their own set of rules and teach according to their emotions or feelings and usually, leave the class when they think they are tired. Freire (1985) warns that education is a form of politics. He notes that schooling is never neutral; instead, it always serves some interests and impedes others. He insists that schooling can be used for liberation, just as it has been used for oppression. When teachers go into the classroom as and when they desire, even though that might not always be the right approach to the profession, they are playing politics with the lives of other people’s children, and once you can do something that the affected cannot complain about, you become the oppressor.

The journey to making changes in the way we teach in Ghana may be a bumpy one; the teacher who decides to practise critical pedagogy may feel that s/he is travelling a lonely road and so will feel discouraged, as Miller suggests. He recognizes that there will be difficulties when teachers try to practise it but admonish them to do it. It is in doing so that they can fulfill this great commission, helping students learn in a more conducive, liberatory environment. Thus, the time has come for technology-age Ghanaian students to experience the kind of education that makes them feel empowered in school.

Critical pedagogy is a viable alternative to be considered compared to the traditional type of education practised in Ghana. Obidah (2000) argues that it is “a systematic interrogation of schools and schooling processes that enables educators to see terrains not simply as sites of instruction or as arenas of indoctrination and socialization but as cultural terrains that promote and/or negate students’ empowerment and teachers’ self-transformation” (Obidah, 2000, p. 1040). Giroux (1988) also states that critical pedagogy “takes into account consideration how the symbolic and material transactions of every day provide the basis for rethinking how people give meaning and ethical substance to their experiences and voices” (p. 10). Thus, I argue that this type of pedagogy begins with human agency (or being humanized) as Freire reveals, with a view of teachers as transformative intellectuals who critically examine the traditional notions of power and authority in the classroom and allow intellectual and critical spaces to exist in order for students to make meaning and find power for themselves. This study used the only questionnaire and interview to gather the data for analysis. It is suggested that future studies can use observation (in addition to these two) to obtain comprehensive data for analysis. Also, future research may focus on the challenges of the application of critical pedagogy in the classroom so that we may better understand and appreciate the challenges and how teachers can overcome them.

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