


# Chapter 15

## Critical Pedagogy and Social Justice in EFL: Bridging Language Learning and Empowerment

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### ABSTRACT

*This chapter explores the intersection of critical pedagogy (CP) and social justice in the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom. It examines how EFL instruction, traditionally focused on linguistic competence, can be transformed into a site of empowerment and sociopolitical engagement. By incorporating the principles of CP, educators can challenge hegemonic discourses, foster critical consciousness, and equip students with the linguistic and cognitive tools necessary for advocating social change. This chapter will present theoretical foundations, pedagogical strategies, and case studies that illustrate the potential of a social justice-oriented EFL curriculum. This chapter is grounded in Paulo Freire's concept of critical pedagogy, which views education as a means of social transformation. Additionally, it draws from intersectionality theory (Crenshaw, 1989) to examine how various social identities interact within language learning contexts.*

### INTRODUCTION

Teachers and students experience daily realities that are external to their learning environments (Freire, 2005). These elements have an impact on numerous aspects of the teaching and learning process. Historically, educational systems have focused on

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knowledge transfer while ignoring critical social elements that determine students' identities and experiences. These include ethnicity, gender, social situation, cultural background, sexual orientation, age, abilities, disabilities, immigrant status, and religion, among others (Hankivsky, 2014). Such personal and social factors have a significant impact on students' lives and learning (Fajardo-Dack et al., 2024).

Critical pedagogy (CP) is an educational paradigm that investigates the connections amongst power, social justice, and knowledge (Zembylas, 2018). It promotes the ability of students to develop critical consciousness by challenging dominant ideas and power systems (Abednia & Izadinia, 2013). This method seeks to empower students as critical thinkers who criticize repressive social institutions and seek change through education. Moreover, it offers a theoretical framework for analyzing power systems in education while emphasizing students' actual experiences, interests, and questions (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008). One of the most immediate power dynamics students confront is the teacher-student interaction (Bradshaw, 2017). CP, as an educational philosophy and social movement, combines education and critical theory to investigate the interconnections of oppression, literacy, and practice. This lens helps students develop critical understanding of social, political, economic, gender, racial, and class contradictions, allowing them to take action against inequities (McLaren, 2003).

Blommaert and Rampton (2016) state that globalization has transformed social, cultural, and linguistic diversity around the world. One of its distinguishing features is the tremendous growth of electronic communication, fueled in the main by the internet. This global network has transformed the world into a complex web of interrelated communities (Blommaert, 2010), influencing economic imperatives and linguistic identities. English, as the dominant language of digital communication, has developed into a valuable worldwide commodity. Given this context, English is increasingly viewed as a tool for social advancement and equalizing possibilities (Rao, 2016). According to Jenkins (2000), the goal should be to make English more cross-culturally democratic, ensuring "ownership" by everyone who use it, regardless of nationality or origin.

This chapter examines the meeting of CP and social justice in the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom. Traditionally, EFL instruction has prioritized linguistic competence, but CP redefines it as a space for empowerment and socio-political engagement. By using these principles, educators can challenge dominant discourses, cultivate critical consciousness, and equip students with the linguistic and cognitive tools needed to campaign for social change. Using theoretical foundations, pedagogical strategies, and case studies as a template, this chapter illustrates how a social justice-oriented EFL curriculum can transform language education. The objectives of the chapter are to:

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