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Critical Pedagogy: Exploring EFL Instructors' Cognitions in Teaching Writing

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Abstract

This study employed a qualitative critical case study design to explore EFL instructors' cognitions of critical pedagogy (CP) in teaching writing at the University of Gondar, providing deep insights into gaps in CP conceptions within the Ethiopian higher education context. Three instructors were purposively selected for their CP orientation and their roles in delivering writing courses. Pre-observation interviews were conducted, and data were analyzed through reflexive thematic analysis. The findings revealed diverse conceptions of critical pedagogy (CP) in teaching writing, with two instructors emphasizing collaboration, creativity, and active participation, while the other adhering to a more traditional, accuracy-focused model, reflecting differing degrees of alignment with CP principles. All recognized the significant impact of continuous professional development (CPD) on their teaching philosophies and highlighted the importance of student engagement through dialogue and collaboration. They acknowledged the need to adapt materials to students' interests, but reliance on exam-oriented assessments, imposed curriculum guidelines, limited resources, and inadequate training posed challenges. The findings suggest a need for enhanced professional development programs focusing on critical pedagogy in adopting more interactive and student-centered assessment practices. Additionally, addressing resource limitations and promoting flexible curricula will be crucial for effectively implementing critical pedagogy in writing instruction.

Keywords: Critical pedagogy, EFL instructors' cognition, Teaching writing

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Introduction

English has been recognized as a fundamental educational requirement globally (Maurais & Morris, 2003). It serves as the primary medium of instruction at secondary and tertiary levels, and is vital for both spoken and written communication across various contexts (Alamirew, 2005; Haregwoine, 2008; Zhu, 2004). More specifically, Zhu (2004) underscored the critical importance of developing writing in documentation-based careers today, encouraging tertiary institutions to prioritize academic writing.

In a similar vein, the Ministry of Science and Higher Education (MoE, 2020) devised a harmonized newly developed curriculum that reflects this emphasis, with Department of English Language and Literature offering six writing courses, namely sophomore English, intermediate writing, research and report writing, advanced writing I, advanced writing II, and creative writing for undergraduates. Notably, the Management and Economics departments of the College of Business and Economics (CBE) and the Educational Planning and Management (EDPM) department of the College of Education revised their curricula incorporating a Basic Writing Skills course, alongside Communicative English Language Skills I and II at the undergraduate level. This demonstrates a concerted effort to prioritize writing skills within these departments, despite the Ministry's exclusion of Basic Writing Skills from the harmonized curriculum as a common course for all university departments.

Despite this prioritization, challenges persist due to discrepancies between teachers' cognition and practices (Alzaanin, 2019; Suwaed, 2011; Yitayal, 2022; Zhao, 2019). Borg (2003) and Kumaravadivelu (2003) emphasize that teacher cognition significantly influences daily teaching practices, shaping how instructors approach classroom instruction. Studies also underscore difficulties related to a predominant focus on conventional/banking teaching approaches, which prioritize accuracy and fluency in the final written product, promote a test-driven teaching culture that neglect real-world contexts, and rely on imitation of model texts (Alateeq, 2020; Amare, 2017; Badge & White, 2000; Byram, 2004; Carbone, 2009; Kaewnuch, 2019; Kim & Kim, 2005; Tagesse, 2012; Uddin, 2014). Researchers also noted challenges in teaching writing, including instructors' limited pedagogical skills, reliance on prepackaged materials, time constraints for drafting and feedback, large class sizes, and top-down curriculum directives (Alzaanin, 2019; Hyland, 2019; Yang & Gao, 2013). In this regard, Borg (2003) and Kumaravadivelu (2003) highlight that teacher cognition, particularly their conceptions of critical pedagogy in teaching writing as explored in my current study, is pivotal in shaping the content and nature of daily teaching practices. In response to the highlighted challenges, Freire (2000), Kumaravadivelu (2003),

Canagarajah, (2005), and Kincheloe (2008) suggest a post-method approach that incorporates Freire's critical pedagogy (CP), outlined in "Pedagogy of the Oppressed," into EFL writing instruction.

In essence, Critical Pedagogy (CP), rooted in critical theory, is integrated into this study as an approach to teaching, learning, materials, and assessment in writing (Moreno-Lopez, 2005; Canagarajah, 2012, 2013; Crookes, 2012; Yang, 2020). Unlike other language skills, writing under CP emphasizes deep reflection, critical engagement, and the cultivation of a personal, critical voice. This aligns with CP's transformative goals of empowering students to question dominant narratives and pursue extended critical inquiry (Alateeq, 2020; Kline & Kang, 2022). By challenging the traditional banking model of education, CP advocates for materials tailored to students' needs and experiences, positions writing as a social practice, and enables students to express diverse perspectives (Abednia & Karrabi, 2010; Alateeq, 2020; Barnawi, 2011; Chi, 2011; Ibrahim, 2013; Matsuda, 2003; Mazdaee & Maftoon, 2012; Morrell, 2003; Qoyyimah et al., 2022; Yang, 2020). Moreover, CP aligns with postmodernism and post-process theories, which reject fixed realities, promote diverse perspectives, contextualize writing, and prioritize collaboration (Atkinson, 2003; Finch, 2006; Kaewnuch, 2019; Kent, 1999; Kumaravadivelu, 2012).

Accordingly, critical pedagogy and writing instruction are commendable in this study for four particular reasons. The first reason is based on the calls from scholars like Yang (2020), Alateeq (2020), Qoyyimah et al. (2022), and Kline and Kang (2022), who have advocated for more case studies, classroom observations, and localized research on writing instruction from CP perspectives. These requests underscore the need for detailed, context-based studies in the field of EFL writing instruction. The second justification emerged from my engagement with 'Critical Pedagogy' and a critical review of Paulo Freire's Pedagogy of the Oppressed during my postgraduate studies reshaped my teaching philosophy, emphasizing educators as co-learners rather than authoritarian figures and fostering collaboration and inclusivity.

The third reason that inspired me to do this study sprang from the discussion held on November 5, 2021 among colleagues composed of four volunteer instructors who have taught writing courses for a minimum of five years in the targeted university. These instructors highlighted several challenges in the current practice of teaching writing, which were inconsistent with broader concerns in Ethiopian higher education. Specifically, they noted such issues as the inclusion of unfamiliar writing topics, a prescriptive teaching approach with top-down directives, and an overemphasis on the product approach, which

focuses primarily on grammar. Furthermore, the dominant use of a process approach, which treats writing as a series of discrete stages (pre-writing, writing, and re-writing), seemed to discourage deeper engagement. The instructors also cited students' fear of making mistakes, the achievement-based, summative assessment system (which accounts for 80% of midterm and final exam grades), and the reluctance to allow peer feedback as major barriers to effective writing instruction. These concerns misalign with the goals outlined in the Ethiopian Education Development Roadmap (2018), which emphasizes the need for graduates who can think critically, creatively, and solve problems. The gaps between the current practice and the national educational focus highlighted the need for a more critical examination of teaching methods, which this study sought to address.

The final motive for this study arose from a review of teachers' cognitions of critical pedagogy (CP) in teaching writing, both globally and locally. For example, Mazdaee and Maftoon (2012) and Alateeq (2020) explored power dynamics in CP abroad, while my study incorporates problem-posing and dialogic engagement. Selamawit (2019) provides quantitative insights into secondary school teachers but diverges from CP's emphasis on qualitative reflection (Clark, 2020; Finch, 2006; Kincheloe & McLaren, 2011) and focuses on preparatory, rather than tertiary-level, EFL writing. This study, therefore, aims to address gaps in existing research by exploring EFL instructors' conceptions of critical pedagogy in teaching writing courses.

Research Methodology

Research Paradigm

The researcher adopted the critical/transformative paradigm, aligning with Mertens (2010), Creswell and Poth (2016), and Kincheloe and McLaren (2011). This paradigm, ideal for exploring power dynamics, dialogism, reflexivity, and problem-posing, guides the investigation of EFL instructors' cognitions in teaching writing. It views writing instruction as multifaceted, integrates student experiences through interactions (ontology), emphasizes collaborative writing as a social process (epistemology), and employs a qualitative embedded single case study (methodology).

Research Approach

For this study, a qualitative approach was utilized to investigate EFL instructors' cognitions of critical pedagogy in teaching writing. This choice is supported by Creswell and Poth (2016), Patton (2014), Taylor et al. (2015), and Mackey and Gass (2021), who highlight the qualitative approach's ability to thoroughly examine social or human concerns.

Additionally, critical pedagogy often lends itself to qualitative exploration, focusing on the practices of individual educators or small groups (Clark, 2020; Finch, 2006; Kincheloe & McLaren, 2011).

Research Design

In accordance with Creswell and Poth (2016), case study research involves the qualitative exploration of a bounded system (a case) or multiple bounded systems (cases) over time, with detailed data collection and the reporting of case descriptions and themes. In the context of this study, a critical single case study design was selected to explore EFL instructors' conceptions of critical pedagogy in teaching writing at the University of Gondar because the case provides an opportunity to examine a particular instance in depth, offering valuable insights into how critical pedagogy is understood and applied in a specific educational setting. This design is particularly useful when the objective is not to generalize findings but to gain a deep, context-specific understanding of a complex issue that has broader implications for the field. This design aligns with Yin's (2018) assertion that a critical single case study design provides in-depth insights into a specific case.

Research Setting, Participants and Sampling Techniques

Research Setting

The researcher opted for tertiary settings, particularly the University of Gondar in Ethiopia, for various reasons. Firstly, its diverse participants, and resource availability foster a collaborative inquiry, interdisciplinary approaches, and critical examination of theories and practices, all of which are consistent with critical pedagogy concepts. Secondly, input from four instructors during the preliminary investigation helped frame the problem statement, ensuring the research addressed a relevant issue with a clear focus. This input revealed that the current method of teaching writing at the university was ineffective. Finally, my familiarity with the university and close relationship with its instructors allowed me to engage with the participants and collect iterative data, thereby improving the overall quality of the study.

Participants and Sampling Techniques

After receiving permission from the Department of English Language and Literature, I arranged face-to-face meetings with eight volunteer EFL instructors who had taken the critical pedagogy course the day before the pre-observation interviews. During these meetings, I presented the consent letter and explained the study's objectives, data collection methods, voluntary participation, and confidentiality. Following this, three EFL

instructors were purposively selected based on their orientation toward critical pedagogy, their involvement in teaching writing courses during the data collection semesters, and their willingness to participate. These instructors, who teach Basic Writing Skills and Advanced Writing I courses to undergraduate students majoring in Management, Economics, and English Language and Literature at the University of Gondar, agreed to participate under the pseudonyms Serawit (a PhD holder), Hamid (a lecturer and PhD candidate), and Getachew (a PhD holder), with their consent.

Data Collection Tools and Procedures

To achieve the study's purpose, the researcher adapted Alateeq's (2020) pre-observation interview protocols, which consisted of 12 open-ended questions, to gather instructors' cognitions of critical pedagogy in teaching writing. The interview questions were carefully validated by two supervisors and four colleagues to refine any unclear or difficult phrasing. Following this, the researcher conducted interviews with each instructor: Serawit on May 29, 2023; Hamid on February 21, 2024; and Getachew on May 17, 2024.

Method of Data Analysis

Following the pre-observation interviews, the researcher applied Braun and Clarke's (2006, 2019) reflexive thematic analysis (RTA) to identify patterns in instructors' cognitions on teaching writing through critical pedagogy. The interview transcripts were compiled in Word documents alongside audio files, and then imported into ATLAS.ti 8 for theme visualization. The analysis followed Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step thematic process, as outlined in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Phases of Thematic Analysis

Phase	Description of the process
1. Familiarization with the data:	Transcribing data (if necessary), reading and re-reading the data, noting down initial ideas.
	Coding interesting features of the data in a systematic fashion across the entire data set, collating data relevant to each code.
2. Generating initial codes:	
	Collating codes into potential themes, gathering all data relevant to each potential theme.
3. Searching for themes:	
	Checking if the themes work in relation to the coded extracts (Level 1) and the entire data set (Level 2), generating a thematic 'map' of the analysis.
4. Reviewing themes:	

5. Defining and naming themes:	Ongoing analysis to refine the specifics of each theme, and the overall story the analysis tells, generating clear definitions and names for each theme.
6. Writing up the report:	The final opportunity for analyzing the selected extracts, relating back of the analysis to the research question and literature, producing a scholarly report of the analysis.

Results

Results on EFL Instructors' Conceptions of CP in Teaching Writing

This section summarizes findings from pre-observation interviews conducted with three instructors on their conceptions of critical pedagogy (CP) in teaching writing at the University of Gondar. Serawit and Getachew taught Basic Writing Skills, while Hamid taught Advanced Writing I. The study assumes that expertise and willing instructors integrate CP tenets into their objectives, teaching methods, materials, and assessments. Six key themes were identified: instructional approaches and objectives, professional development, student engagement, instructional materials, assessment processes, and challenges encountered.

Theme 1: Instructional Approaches and Objectives

In the instructional approach and objective theme, two EFL instructors prioritized collaboration, creativity, critique, social interaction, and active participation, while the other one emphasized a more process-focused approach, prioritizing accuracy. One interviewee was quoted explaining as follows:

Even if students prefer reading and grammar lessons, I use engaging writing prompts, peer sharing, relevant tasks, 15-20 minute peer collaboration sessions, and class-wide discussions to critique sample writing, help students become skilled communicators and encouraging creativity (S-POI2).

Similarly, the other respondent reported,
My teaching philosophy prioritizes a student-centered approach, promoting cooperation, social interaction, and active participation. Through pair work, group activities, and pyramid discussions, I teach essay writing, ensuring relevance to real-life personal and social challenges (H-POI3).

With a slight difference, another instructor explicated:

> *My teaching philosophy involves tasks related to students' backgrounds. I encourage discussion and facilitate through lectures, followed by writing paragraph or essay. I review their work for accuracy and proper progression. Rarely, I employ free-writing to foster confidence and autonomy (G-POI).*

The excerpts revealed that instructors used varied EFL writing strategies. Serawit employed interactive techniques like writing prompts and peer sharing to boost communication and creativity. Hamid utilized discussion-based methods, including pair and group work, to enhance essay writing. In contrast, Getachew focused on tasks aligned with students' backgrounds, using lectures and writing exercises to ensure accuracy and progress, with occasional free-writing to build confidence. This implies that Serawit and Hamid's approaches are closely aligned with critical pedagogy, emphasizing collaboration and critical reflection, while Getachew's method, though student-centered, leaned toward a traditional banking model, emphasizing accuracy and structure. Despite these differences, all instructors adapted their teaching to meet diverse student needs and promote writing as self-expression.

Theme 2: Professional Development and Educational Influences

In the second theme, focusing on professional development and educational influence, all instructors' teaching philosophies were notably shaped by various educational programs and training experiences. This is evident in the following excerpt, where one instructor stated:

> *I engaged in extensive reading on writing instruction during my PhD studies, broadening my perspective. Furthermore, participating in the Higher Diploma Program enhanced my expertise in teaching methods, curriculum development, assessment, and classroom management, emphasizing learner-centered and active learning strategies (S-POI2).*

Similarly, the other interviewee reflected as:

> *I participated in various English language training sessions and professional development programs, including the English Language Improvement Program and the Higher Diploma Program. These programs emphasized writing assignments, reshaping my perspective on writing skills and effective teaching methods (H-POI3).*

Adding to this, an instructor reported as:

> *Yes, I attended IELTS and TESOL training by British Council and HDP at our university, gaining insights into active learning and contextualized teaching. However, implementation faces challenges with student reluctance, large classes, and exam-focused instruction (G-POI1).*

The extracts from the three instructors highlighted how professional development influenced their writing instruction. Serawit broadened his outlook through academic reading and the Higher Diploma Program (HDP), which promoted learner-centered strategies like student-led writing practice and class discussions. Hamid's involvement in programs like ELIP and HDP reshaped his approach to writing skills and teaching methods. Getachew's training in IELTS, TESOL, and HDP emphasized active learning and contextualized teaching, though he struggled with challenges, such as student reluctance and large classes. Despite their differences, all instructors adopted a more student-centered, collaborative approach, aligning with critical pedagogy principles.

Theme 3: Students Engagement and Participation

In the third theme, focusing on student engagement and participation, the instructors underlined the importance of fostering dialogue, collaboration, discussion and active involvement in writing classes. Regarding this, one instructor explained:

> *I encourage student interest in writing through dialogue and collaboration, using class time for meaningful activities and urging students to finish writing outside class. Peer feedback sessions and evaluation criteria create a supportive, respectful learning environment that enhances the learning experience (S-POI2).*

Nearly in the same way, the other instructor was quoted saying:

> *I encourage dialogue and participation in writing classes, gradually shifting responsibility to students. Initially structured, I then facilitate open dialogue and idea-sharing. Writing should address societal issues, with students gaining diverse perspectives. Teachers should co-learn, recognizing writing's dynamic nature (H-POI3).*

Likewise, as an instructor reported:

> *I use group discussions, games, and videos related to students' backgrounds to elicit knowledge and generate ideas in writing. Students first write individually, then exchange work for peer feedback, fostering critical analysis and connecting personal experiences to writing tasks (G-POI1).*

The extracts from the three instructors highlighted their shared commitment to fostering student engagement and participation in writing classes. Serawit emphasized dialogue, collaboration, and peer feedback to create a supportive learning environment. Hamid encouraged open dialogue, gradually shifting responsibility to students and focusing on societal issues in writing. Getachew used group discussions and activities linked to students' backgrounds to generate ideas, followed by individual writing and peer feedback. Though their methods varied, all instructors promoted dialogue, teamwork, and active involvement, aligning with critical pedagogy's focus on student-centered learning and collaboration.

Theme 4: Instructional Materials and Strategies

In theme four, all three instructors recognized the importance of adapting course materials
to better meet students' needs and interests. As one respondent noted:

> *I have modified content individually, but creating materials for all teachers requires*
> *committee involvement, which we lack. I let students choose their writing topics,*
> *enhancing creativity and responsibility. They discuss social media, artificial*
> *intelligence, football, abortion, technology, disability, climate change, education, and*
> *politics (S-POI2).*

Again, as one instructor attempted to reflect:

> *The advanced writing course follows a product-based approach, replicating model*
> *essays. I found this limited, so I added process writing, strategic-based writing,*
> *and self-regulation. I advocate for student-chosen topics to boost motivation and*
> *critical thinking. My students prefer topics like social media, local heroes, scientific*
> *wonders, and environmental issues (H-POI3).*

Adding on to this, the other interviewee revealed:

> *The curriculum offers 20% flexibility for adaptation, but we mainly adhere to the*
> *syllabus. Personally, I incorporate varied tasks to enhance engagement, linking*
> *content to students' experiences. Despite limited autonomy in topic selection within*
> *Ethiopian higher education, students show greater interest in familiar topics, such*
> *as local games and social media, over unfamiliar ones like international conflicts or*
> *European football (G-POI1).*

The excerpts from the three instructors underscored the importance of tailoring course
content and activities to students' specific needs and interests in writing instruction.
Serawit emphasized individual content modifications, allowing students to choose topics,
such as social media and climate change to enhance creativity and responsibility. Hamid
critiqued the product-based approach, integrating process writing and self-regulation,
and supported student-chosen topics, including social media and environmental issues to
foster motivation and critical thinking. Getachew diversified tasks to enhance engagement
while sticking to syllabus topics, though he observed that students had limited freedom
in selecting topics and often preferred familiar topics like local games and sports. Despite
these constraints, all instructors aimed to adapt materials to include relevant content and
alternative topics, reflecting critical-postmodern values.

Theme 5: Assessment Process and Feedback

In theme five, three instructors offered distinct perspectives on assessment and feedback
within writing instruction. As to this, one of the interviewees explicated the following:

> *In my writing class, I use quizzes, attendance, exams, assignments, and peer*

review sessions for multimodal assessment. I allocate percentages to quizzes (10%), assignments (10%), attendance (5%), midterm (25%), and final exam (50% (S-POI2).

With a little difference, the other interviewee said :

My approach to assessing students' writing emphasizes both the process and the final outcome. I integrate diary or portfolio submissions, replacing midterms with diary-based assignments and discussing final exam formats with students, reflecting my willingness to negotiate the assessment process (H-POI3).

The third instructor informed as:

I primarily assess writing skills through summative assessments, allocating 80% of the grade to written exams and 20% to assigned tasks. Implementing formative assessments is challenging due to large class sizes and curriculum direction. I occasionally include peer review but predominantly provide feedback by myself. Topics for exams are predetermined, selected to align with students' backgrounds (G-POI1).

The excerpts revealed that the instructors employed diverse assessment techniques to evaluate students' writing skills. Serawit used a multimodal approach, incorporating quizzes, assignments, attendance, midterms, and finals. Hamid emphasized both the writing process and final product, integrating diary or portfolio submissions and negotiating the assessment process with students. Getachew relied mainly on summative assessments, with 80% of the grade from written exams and 20% from tasks, though large class sizes limited his use of formative assessments. While most instructors leaned toward syllabus-oriented assessments, reflecting a banking pedagogy, Hamid's inclusion of portfolios suggested a shift toward more interactive methods aligned with critical pedagogy.

Theme 6: Challenges Encountered

Teaching writing in English as a foreign language presents numerous challenges, as described by the instructors. One of the responders said that:

Large class sizes pose a challenge in providing feedback to all students effectively. Additionally, adhering to externally imposed curriculum materials can hinder providing to students' individual needs and interests (S-POI2).

In a similar depth, an instructor articulated the following:

Teaching writing presents numerous obstacles. Some students suffer because of linguistic proficiency limits, while others lack motivation and subject matter knowledge which impedes their performance. Plagiarism is another problem, with students occasionally copying assignments from the internet. To overcome these challenges, I personalize assignments to the students' experiences, and focus

on topics that are relevant to their daily lives. Additionally, teachers may face inadequate resources, and a lack of access to training to effectively teach writing. The curriculum also lacks sufficient credit hours for writing courses to fully develop writing skills, and it is inflexible (H-POI3).

Similarly, the other participant added that:
There are many challenges, including less flexible course materials, predetermined assessment modalities, lack of teacher training, and large class sizes. The curriculum and teaching methods should be revisited to better meet students' needs (G-POI1).

The excerpts highlighted multifaceted challenges in teaching writing, including student, teacher, and institutional issues. Serawit noted difficulties in providing feedback due to large class sizes and the limitations imposed by external materials. Hamid pointed to problems such as students' linguistic proficiency, lack of motivation, plagiarism, and insufficient resources. Both instructors mentioned that imposed curriculum and limited credit hours hindered the development of critical writing skills. Getachew faced similar challenges with curriculum guidelines, predetermined assessments, and large classes. To address these obstacles, the instructors emphasized the need for flexibility, institutional support, access to training, and personalized, student-driven assignments, aligning with critical pedagogy principles.

Discussion of the Findings

This section synthesizes the key findings from the preceding analysis, aligning them with relevant literature and theoretical frameworks to address the objective of investigating EFL instructors' conceptions of CP in writing instruction. The study identified six core themes reflecting EFL instructors' views on teaching writing, as detailed in section 3.1 of the results.

EFL Instructors Conceptions on Critical Pedagogy in Teaching Writing

The pre-observation interviews revealed varied instructional strategies aimed at enhancing student engagement and writing skills among EFL instructors. Serawit and Hamid embraced student-centered methods, emphasizing collaboration, social interaction, and active participation through peer sharing, group activities, and real-world applications. This reflects Freire's problem-posing pedagogy, fostering a participatory environment where students critically engage with personal and societal issues, aligning with critical pedagogy's focus on social, dialogic, and contextual aspects of writing (Akbari, 2008; Alateeq, 2020; Chi, 2011; Freire, 2000; Izadinia, 2009; Kent, 1999; Matsuda, 2003; Morrel, 2003; Nelson & Chen, 2023; Yang, 2020). In contrast, Getachew focused on tasks

connected to students' backgrounds, using lectures, writing exercises, and detailed reviews to ensure accuracy. His more traditional approach prioritizes accuracy and fluency, occasionally incorporating free-writing for confidence building, which aligns less with the dialogical and emancipatory aspects of critical pedagogy (Carbone, 2009; Shor, 2012; Uddin, 2014; Zhao, 2019). Despite their differences, all instructors shared a commitment to empowering students through writing, aiming to foster a dialogic environment that values diverse perspectives, in line with the objectives of critical pedagogy in writing classrooms (Alateeq, 2020; Carbone, 2009; Mazdaee & Maftoon, 2012; Yang, 2020).

Under the second theme, the instructors' professional development experiences, such as participation in HDP, ELIP, IELTS, and TESOL programs, profoundly shaped their teaching philosophies in writing instruction. Continuous professional development (CPD), as evidenced by Serawit, Hamid, and Getachew, refined their teaching practices, encouraging diverse strategies that emphasize active and critical engagement. This reflects research highlighting the role of reflection, adaptation, and inclusive, student-centered approaches (Akbari, 2008; Alateeq, 2020; Kumaravadivelu, 2012; Yang, 2020). Additionally, studies by Lee (2010), Liu & Xia (2011), Borg (2011), and Tseng (2019) underscore the importance of professional interactions and in-service training in shaping instructional strategies. However, Getachew continues to face challenges with student reluctance, large classes, and exam-focused instruction, highlighting persistent barriers to fully implementing active and contextualized teaching methods, as noted by Alateeq (2020).

In exploring student engagement among EFL instructors, three distinct yet complementary approaches emerged. Serawit promoted dialogue, collaboration, and peer feedback, while Hamid encouraged participation by gradually shifting responsibility to students. Getachew used group discussions and activities connected to students' backgrounds to generate ideas. These methods reflect a shared commitment to fostering collaboration and active student involvement. Studies by Canagarajah (2015), Mazdaee and Maftoon (2012), Huang (2012), Yang (2020), Alateeq (2020), Alexander (2020), Moradian et al. (2021), and Qoyyimah (2021) support the benefits of dialogical classrooms for enhancing engagement and critical thinking, aligning with Freire's (1970) idea that teachers and students learn from each other through dialogue.

The fourth theme analysis revealed that all instructors emphasized adapting instructional materials to incorporate everyday content and activities that reflect critical-postmodern values, though some faced constraints. Serawit individualized content, allowing students to choose topics such as social media, AI, disability, climate change, education, and politics, fostering creativity and responsibility. Hamid critiqued the product-based approach, integrating process writing and self-regulation, and promoting student-chosen topics like social media, local heroes, and environmental issues to boost motivation and critical thinking. This aligns with research suggesting that real-world, relatable topics enhance student engagement in writing (Abednia & Karrabi, 2010; Alateeq, 2020; Al Riyami & Troudi, 2020; Mazdaee & Maftoon, 2012; Morrell, 2003; Yang, 2020), reflecting

postmodernism's rejection of standardized instructional material (Usher & Edwards, 2007) and post-process theory's dynamic view of writing (Atkinson, 2003). Scholars like Akbari (2008) and Ibrahim (2013) also advocate for localizing ELT materials to empower critical analysis and societal improvement. In contrast, Getachew adhered to syllabus topics but diversified tasks to enhance engagement, acknowledging students' limited freedom in topic choice and their preference for familiar topics like local games and social media. This finding is consistent with studies by Albedaiwi (2014), Alnefaie (2016), and Amare (2017), which highlight that teachers in many EFL contexts rarely re-adapt provided content. Overall, the instructors strived to balance curriculum demands with engaging, relevant, and student-centered content.

The fifth theme analysis revealed diverse perspectives on assessment and feedback in writing instruction among the three instructors. Serawit adopted a multimodal approach, incorporating quizzes, assignments, attendance (25%), and midterm and final exams (75%). This aligns with Lee's (2010, 2011) observation that EFL writing is often more tested than taught. Getachew relies heavily on summative assessments, assigning 80% of the grade to written exams and 20% to assignments, facing difficulties with formative assessments due to large class sizes and strict adherence to the curriculum. Both instructors' structured assessment systems prioritize exams, aligning with an achievement-oriented approach over a performance-oriented one (AlSeghayer, 2015). This mirrors findings by Carbone (2009), Zhao (2010), Tagesse (2012), Amare (2017), and Yitayal (2022), which highlighted the dominance of exams as assessment tools in EFL contexts. However, Chi (2011) suggests reducing the pressure of grades to foster a more transformative pedagogy.

Conversely, Hamid incorporated portfolios and diary submissions, shifting from product-based evaluations to more interactive and dynamic assessment practices aligning with critical pedagogy features. Hamid's use of alternative assessments, such as peer evaluation, resonates with studies by Cheng et al. (2004) and Yang (2020), which highlight the preference for journals and portfolios as more effective assessment methods among teachers. Overall, Hamid's approach stands as a counterpoint to the exam-focused methods of his colleagues, promoting a more dynamic assessment process.

The final theme revealed various challenges hindering effective writing instruction for the three instructors. Serawit pointed to large class sizes and reliance on externally imposed materials, which limited meaningful feedback and addressing individual needs. Hamid noted problems like limited linguistic proficiency, lack of motivation, plagiarism, insufficient resources, and inadequate training, compounded by inflexible curriculum and insufficient credit hours for writing courses. Getachew faced similar difficulties with prescribed curriculum guidelines, predetermined assessments, and large class sizes. These challenges align with research by Yang & Gao (2013), Ibrahim (2013), Hyland (2019), Alzaanin (2019), Alateeq (2020), Qoyyimah (2021), Yitayal (2022), and Nkealah and Simango (2023), which highlighted common obstacles like limited pedagogical skills, reliance on prepackaged materials, test-driven practices, resource shortages, students' poor writing proficiency and attitudes, time constraints, and top-down directives. The

instructors' reflections underscored the need for flexibility, responsiveness, institutional support, student-centered assessments, and access to professional development to overcome these barriers and better align with critical pedagogy principles (Alateeq, 2020; Harrison, 2018).

Conclusions and Implications

Based on the findings presented and discussed, this section summarizes the main conclusions and explores potential implications of the study.

Conclusions

Based on the results, EFL instructors exhibited varied conceptions of critical pedagogy (CP) in teaching writing. In terms of instructional approach, Serawit and Hamid aligned closely with CP, emphasizing collaboration, creativity, and active participation through interactive methods, peer feedback, and real-life relevance in writing tasks. In contrast, Getachew's student-centered approach leaned toward a traditional model focused on accuracy and structure, reflecting a divergence in CP application. All instructors acknowledged the significant impact of continuous professional development (CPD) on their teaching philosophies, highlighting its role in enhancing understanding of learner-centered strategies and active learning.

A strong emphasis on student engagement was evident, as all instructors promoted dialogue, collaboration, and peer feedback, aligning with CP's focus on student-centered learning and collaborative power dynamics. They recognized the need to adapt instructional materials to meet students' interests, with Serawit and Hamid encouraged student-chosen topics to boost motivation and creativity, while Getachew adhered to syllabus-driven topics but diversified tasks for relevance.

Diverse assessment strategies were employed, with Serawit and Getachew relying heavily on written exams, suggesting a need for greater alignment with CP principles. In contrast, Hamid incorporated portfolios, reflecting a move toward more interactive assessments. The instructors faced numerous challenges, including large class sizes, reliance on external materials, limited linguistic proficiency, low student motivation, plagiarism, resource shortages, and inadequate training, all of which hindered effective implementation of CP.

Overall, the instructors' conceptions of CP in teaching writing revealed both strengths and areas for improvement. They embraced student-centered approaches, adapted materials, and recognized the importance of CPD in shaping their teaching philosophies. However, their reliance on traditional assessments and imposed materials, along with challenges like resource limitations and varying levels of student engagement, hindered the full realization of critical pedagogy. These mixed conceptions highlight the need for ongoing support and adaptation to better integrate CP in writing instruction.

Implications

The findings of the study have theoretical, practical, methodological and future research implications for EFL writing instruction, as discussed below.

Theoretical Implications

The findings suggest a need to further develop theoretical frameworks around critical pedagogy (CP) in EFL writing instruction to foster student-centered, reflective, and inclusive practices. By understanding diverse conceptions of CP among instructors, educational theorists can refine models to incorporate collaboration, creativity, and student engagement, moving away from traditional "banking" education towards more emancipatory approaches.

Practical Implications

Professional development programs should equip EFL instructors with strategies to integrate critical pedagogy (CP) principles, such as dialogic engagement, problem-posing approaches, and student empowerment, into writing instruction. These programs should focus on practical tools for shifting from teacher-centered methods to inclusive, learner-centered practices. Institutions should emphasize dialogic orientation, assessment diversification, and the integration of real-life relevance into writing tasks. Encouraging the adaptation of instructional materials to align with student interests and fostering reflective teaching practices can further enhance engagement, motivation, and inclusivity in EFL classrooms.

Methodological Implications

Methodologically, future research with a larger sample size would provide a broader range of perspectives, offering a more comprehensive understanding of critical pedagogy and its diverse applications across different educational contexts. This could involve longitudinal studies that examine the impact of CP on teaching practices over time. Furthermore, incorporating student feedback into research designs can provide valuable insights into the effectiveness of CP in promoting engagement and learning outcomes in writing instruction.

Implications for Future Research

Investigating the effectiveness of innovative assessment strategies, such as portfolios, could also provide valuable insights into how to align assessment practices with CP principles. Additionally, studies examining the role of institutional support in facilitating CP integration would contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of its application

in EFL writing instruction.

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