Critical Pedagogy in Turkish Education System: The Opinions of Academicians

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This study analyzed the Turkish education system in terms of critical pedagogy principles. Through the semi-structured interview form developed within the scope of the research, interviews were conducted with 32 academicians, and the data obtained as a result of the study were brought together on a question basis in the first stage and coded using MAXQDA software. The codes that show the same theme group characteristics and provide integrity of meaning within themselves were brought together. The data obtained in this context were analyzed, and the codes, categories, and themes were visualized and presented in MAXMaps according to their frequency of repetition. As a result of the research, the participants primarily defined the concept of critical pedagogy as a questioning perspective. The participants stated that the education system does not respond to differentiated needs, does not contribute to social justice and equality, and does not pave the way for social change and development. The participants also believe that a qualified and sustainable policy is not implemented in the Turkish education system. It has been argued that teachers do not contribute to pupils becoming influential individuals or thinking critically and that the reasons for this are the educational systems in place. As a result of the study, it was suggested that education should be free from ideology, teachers should be supported intellectually and professionally, and school-family cooperation should be ensured.

INTRODUCTION

Critical education approaches questions and destroys the "false consciousness" surrounding education by revealing the economic, political, and social relations behind present educational institutions. The critical approach to education entails a comprehensive analysis of the various components of the educational process and the intricate relationships among these components through the lenses of social, ideological, economic, philosophical, and political perspectives. This approach espouses the principles of political pluralism and social justice within a democratic framework while simultaneously highlighting a broad humanist ethos that fosters social equality and solidarity among individuals. The central focus of this concept is the establishment of circumstances that facilitate the cultivation of self-awareness in individuals through their engagement with the external environment (Walker, 2010). Critical pedagogy is an educational methodology that draws theoretical foundations from critical theory. Critical pedagogy critiques conventional educational discourses and advocates for transforming schools into spaces facilitating cultural production and advocacy. Additionally, the study endeavors to move beyond basic critique by comprehending the factors contributing to students' opposition and engagement in various human endeavors (Mclaren & Jaramillo, 2009). The educational approach known as critical pedagogy originated in the 1960s, drawing its theoretical foundations and practical applications from the works and methodologies developed by Paulo Freire. Nevertheless, the historical underpinnings of this phenomenon have been molded by the impact of numerous intellectuals and viewpoints. Various influential thinkers have contributed to the development of critical pedagogy. For instance, Karl Marx's emphasis on social class, Vladimir Lenin's focus on practical application, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel's dialectical philosophy, Antonio Gramsci's notion of hegemony, Lev Vygotsky's understanding of contextual factors, Jean-Paul Sartre's existentialist ideas, John Dewey's advocacy for democracy, the critical tradition of the Frankfurt School, Louis Althusser's concept of relative autonomy within the superstructure, Michel Foucault's analysis of power dynamics, Edmund Husserl's phenomenology, Hans-Georg Gadamer's theory of interpretation, and Pierre Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital have all played a significant role in shaping critical pedagogy (Kincheloe, 2018). Scholars in the field of critical pedagogy have established a distinct discourse and pedagogical approach by articulating their extensive reflections on critical education within the intellectual framework shaped by the critical tradition of the Frankfurt School (Kavurgacı & Selvitopu, 2019). Yıldırım (2011) asserts that upon examining the fundamental foundations of critical pedagogy, it becomes evident that radical democracy has developed as a significant movement that envisions reform and transformation within education. This movement aims to advance the principles of democracy, enhance the democratic culture, and foster an enduring sense of engaged citizenship. The objective is to provide a societal framework that actively implements cultural policies, promotes literacy, and encourages the development of critical thinking skills. According to Giroux (2013), critical pedagogy is a political process that sheds light on the complex interplay between knowledge, authority, and power. This process involves questioning who controls the production of knowledge, values, and skills. It also underlines how knowledge,

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identities, and authority are constructed in the context of existing social relations. Critical pedagogy examines these dynamics to question oppressive structures and promote more egalitarian educational practices. The "critical theory" of the Frankfurt School has dramatically influenced the development of critical pedagogy. The primary aim of critical theory, as perceived by the members of this school, is to elicit a vision for a liberated society. It, therefore, involves transforming the power dynamics, exploitation, and dominance within various relations: within individuals, between individuals, objects, and nature. The critical theory aims to realize this transformation under the guidance of theoretical leadership (Odabaş, 2018). The influence of John Dewey's progressive approach to education is essential to developing critical pedagogy. Progressive education includes ideas and practices that aim to enhance the effectiveness of schools as vital components of a democratic society. According to Dewey (1996), the individuals who acquire knowledge through active inquiry and practical application rather than passively receiving it become engaged and informed participants in a democratic society. Dewey's emphasis on the relationship between reflective thinking and experience, his focus on skill acquisition, individual perception, and knowledge integration, and his advocacy of democracy in classrooms have served as guiding principles for critical pedagogues. In addition to John Dewey's progressivism, it can be said that Vygotsky's "social constructivism," considered a theory of contextual development, also contributed to critical pedagogy. Vygotsky emphasizes that learning originates from interpersonal interactions and claims knowledge is constructed through social participation. The basic tenets of social constructivism, namely the idea that knowledge is socially constructed and that individuals are active participants in the learning process, are closely aligned with the broader understanding of critical pedagogy. In the context of critical pedagogy, socially constructed knowledge refers to the idea that the perception of our world is shaped in our minds through symbols formed from social interactions. This construction process relies heavily on cultural factors, contextual influences, traditions, and historical specificity (Nicolopoulou, 2004). Examining the ontological underpinnings of critical pedagogy primarily centers around Freire's formulation of pedagogy for the oppressed, known as the pedagogy of the oppressed (Kincheloe, 2018). When analyzed through a critical pedagogical lens, it is argued that including marginalized voices in education, educational programs, textbooks, and other educational resources is imperative. These voices encompass the perspectives, thoughts, existence, proposed solutions, values, knowledge, and identities of those historically excluded from educational discourse. In this context, the individuals categorized as "oppressed" primarily refer to those classified as "other" within the Western rationality, culture, and methodology framework. This pertains to individuals who experience exclusion and discrimination based on factors such as their race, socioeconomic status, ethnic background, gender, social standing, cultural viewpoint, and physical attributes. Critical pedagogy posits that educational systems must incorporate marginalized individuals' perspectives, ideas, experiences, resolutions, principles, wisdom, and identities. This inclusion should be reflected in curricula, textbooks, and other educational resources. Within this particular framework, the individuals categorized as 'oppressed' frequently experience marginalization due to the Western viewpoints around the approach of intellectual culture. This situation encompasses those who experience prejudice due to several criteria, including but not limited to race, socioeconomic situation, ethnicity, gender, cultural background, social standing, and physical attributes. According to Freire's seminal work in 1998, the central objective of critical pedagogy is the eradication of social disparities, and the emancipation of marginalized individuals through the cultivation of consciousness and proactive engagement. According to Freire, education is a transformative process integrating theory and practice, emphasizing the importance of action and praxis. The author puts forward that educational programs ought to fulfill a dual purpose of facilitating societal progress toward equity and attending to the pragmatic requirements of pupils. Critical pedagogy's primary focal point resides in recognizing the education system's intrinsic political nature. From this particular standpoint, it may be argued that education is not a value-neutral endeavor but rather a political instrument that consistently facilitates societal change. The primary objective of a well-designed educational system should be to promote societal transformation towards equity and fairness, operating within the theoretical framework of critical pedagogy (Apple, 2012).

The potential solution lies in integrating critical pedagogy principles into teaching environments. Critical pedagogy promotes the engagement of students in active participation, critical thinking, and meaningful discourse with their professors. Educators embracing this pedagogical approach are more adept at equipping pupils with the requisite abilities to navigate a culture heavily relying on knowledge. Implementing critical pedagogical concepts necessitates a departure from rote memorization and passive learning, instead

prioritizing cultivating students' autonomy, self-reflection, critical analysis, and problem-solving skills. The potential of this revolutionary change lies in its ability to address the disparity between obsolete educational methods and the current demands of society. Moreover, it empowers students to engage in their educational journey actively.

This study aims to assess the Turkish education system through the lens of critical pedagogy ideas. The study encompasses several sub-problems, which are outlined as follows:

1-What is the perspective of scholars on critical pedagogy?

2-How do the academicians evaluate Turkish education system in terms of critical pedagogy principles?

3- What are the views of scholars about teachers and instructional resources regarding the concepts of critical pedagogy?

METHOD

This section presents the study's design, the participants, the data collection tools, and the techniques used in the data analysis.

Research Design

The present study employed a qualitative research methodology. Qualitative research is a study approach that involves interpreting subjective data from many sources and observing individuals within specific contexts in their authentic settings (Christensen et al., 2015). According to Patton (2014), qualitative research allows one to explore complex and intricate matters deeply. This study employed a qualitative research method to investigate the perspectives of academicians regarding critical pedagogy thoroughly. The study used a case study design, which is a qualitative research method. A case study is a comprehensive analysis and depiction of a restricted system. The utilization of case studies might be advantageous due to their specificity, descriptive nature, and intuitive qualities (Merriam, 2009). Given the focus of the research on the perspectives of academics regarding critical pedagogy, the study was conducted using a case study design.

Participants

The study group of the research consists of 32 academicians. While determining the study group, the maximum diversity sampling method, one of the purposeful sampling methods, was used. The maximum diversity sampling method aims to create a small sample and reflect the diversity of individuals who may be parties to the problem being studied in this sample (Yıldırm & Şimşek, 2008). In this context, the interviews were conducted with 32 academicians with different titles and working in different departments. The distribution of the participants according to academic title is as follows: 6 professors, 12 associate professors, 8 doctoral lecturers, 3 research assistants (PhD.), and 3 lecturers.

Data Collection Instruments

The data for this study were collected through a semi-structured interview form. While preparing the interview questions, a draft interview form was prepared in line with the literature review and submitted for the opinion of four experts with a doctorate in the field of educational sciences. As a result of the expert opinion, the interview form was finalized. The interview form included basic information about the interview, an introduction, an initial question, content questions, probing questions, and closing instructions (Creswell, 2017). In the interview form, there are questions about how critical pedagogy is defined and how to evaluate our education system critically. Some questions in the interview form are: "Have you heard of the concept of critical pedagogy before? How would you define it? What do you think about the dominant social structure and political views in our education system?". A pilot study was conducted with two academicians to determine the comprehensibility of the interview questions. The questions were directed to the participants, for which it was determined that there was no problem regarding comprehensibility.

Data Collection and Analysis

Before starting the data collection process, a pre-prepared form containing the consent for voluntary participation was sent to the participants electronically. A preliminary interview was conducted with the academicians who voluntarily agreed to participate in the study, and the purpose of the study was explained to them. Then, the interview form containing the interview questions was sent by email. The analyses were carried out in line with the responses received. The data obtained in the study were analyzed through content analysis. Content analysis is an analysis method used to express any attempt to reduce and make sense of qualitative data to determine basic consistencies and understandings by taking voluminous qualitative material (Patton, 2014). Content analysis is carried out in four stages. These stages are coding the data, finding

themes, organizing the codes and themes, and defining and interpreting the findings (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2008). In the first stage, the data obtained in this study were gathered, which were based on the questions and coded using MAXQDA software. The codes showing the same theme group characteristics and providing meaningful integrity within themselves were brought together. The data obtained in this context were analyzed, and the codes, categories, and themes were visualized and presented in MAXMaps based on their frequency of repetition.

Validity and Reliability

The concepts of validity and reliability are expressed differently due to the nature of qualitative research. In this regard, the concepts of credibility instead of internal validity, transferability instead of external validity, consistency instead of internal reliability, and confirmability instead of external reliability may be preferred (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; as cited in Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2008). This study considered expert review and participant confirmation to ensure credibility. Within the scope of the expert review, a faculty member who is an expert in qualitative research in Educational Sciences was asked to examine the research in various dimensions. Within the scope of participant confirmation, the research data were reported and sent to the participants, and the opinions of the participants were obtained. In the study, a purposeful sampling method was used to ensure transferability, and direct quotations were included by making detailed descriptions. Within the framework of consistency in the study, a similar approach was followed in preparing interview questions, data collection, and analysis. The interviews were conducted with all participants following similar processes. The results obtained within the scope of confirmability were confirmed by comparing them with the collected data.

Within the scope of the reliability study of the interviews conducted with academicians in the research, the qualitative data obtained from 8 people, which constitute 25% of the total 32 participants, were randomly selected and coded by the researcher and another expert. The codings made by both coders were compared, and it was tried to reach a consensus about the codings. In the continuation of this process, the number of themes with "Consensus" and "Disagreement" was subtracted, and reliability was calculated using Miles and Huberman (1994) reliability formula (Reliability = Consensus / (Consensus + Disagreement)). As a result of the calculation made in this study, reliability was found to be 90.5%. Miles and Huberman (1994) state that if the reliability value is above 70%, it is considered reliable. The study data were analyzed using MAXQDA software.

FINDINGS

The findings are given in 4 parts: the concept of critical pedagogy, evaluation of the education system, evaluation of teachers, and evaluation of curricula and materials.

The Concept of Critical Pedagogy

In this section, the findings of the study are presented. The findings regarding the academicians' perception of critical pedagogy are indicated in Figure 1.
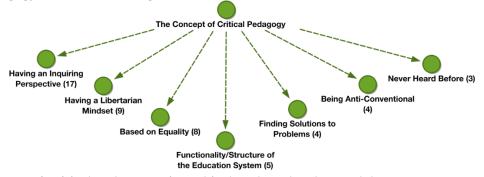

Figure 1: Concept of Critical Pedagogy Hierarchical Code-Subcodes Model

The first theme of the study, the concept of critical pedagogy hierarchical code subcodes model, is shown in Figure 1. The concept of critical pedagogy theme has been examined under 7 different codes, which are: having an inquiring perspective, having a libertarian mindset based on equality, functionality/structure of the education system, finding solutions to problems, and being anti-conventional, never heard before.

In the theme of the concept of critical pedagogy, the participants expressed their opinions about the code "having an inquiring perspective". The participants reported that critical pedagogy has an inquiring perspective on particular situations (P4, P21). The participants also gave their opinions about the code "having

a libertarian mindset". The participants stated that critical pedagogy has a libertarian mindset (P14). The participants also presented their opinions about the code "functionality/structure of the education system" (P5, P26). The participants expressed that critical pedagogy aims to solve problems (P2, P3). The participants stated that critical pedagogy adopts an anti-traditional view (P24). On the other hand, some participants mentioned that they never heard of critical pedagogy (P6, P18). Some participants mentioned the following comments:

> "Yes. It is an approach that enables individuals to handle the events that take place both in educational environments and in their daily lives not as they are but with a questioning approach." (P4)
> "It is a concept that opposes the existing and dominant education systems and the influence of conservative and post-liberalist systems on education. It brings a critical perspective to the education system and advocates that more socialist and libertarian policies should be included in the education system." (K14)

Evaluation of the Education System

The second theme of the study, the evaluation of the education system hierarchical code subcodes model, is shown in Figure 2.
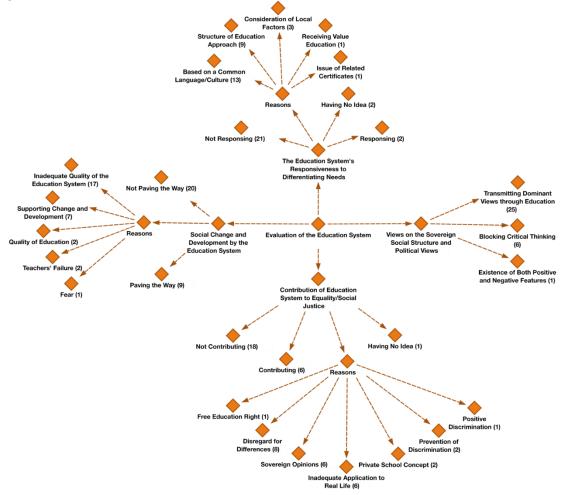

Figure 2: Evaluation of the Education System Hierarchical Code-Subcodes Model

Evaluation of the education system theme has been examined under 4 different categories. These are the education system's responsiveness to differentiating needs, the education system's contribution to equality/social justice, social change and development by the education system, views on the sovereign social structure, and political views.

The Education System's Responsiveness to Differentiating Needs and Reasons

In line with the statements of the participants, the education system's responsiveness to differentiating needs category in the evaluation theme of the education system was defined with 4 different codes: not responding,

having no idea, responding, and reasons. In the category of the education system's responsiveness to differentiating needs, the participants expressed their opinions about the code "not responding". The participants (P2, P4, P6, P7) mentioned that our education system/schools could not respond to the differing needs of students, such as language and culture. The participants (P5, P 13) said they had no idea about this subject. The participants also presented their opinions about the code reasons in the category of the education system's responsiveness to differentiating needs. 5 different subcodes define the reasons. These are based on a standard language/culture (P1, P12), structure of education approach (P15, P21), consideration of local factors (P4, P5), receiving value education (P3), and issue of related certificates (P2). The statements of some participants are as follows:

"I can say that most of them do not reach. It is too centralized in the education system and too far away from seeing the real problems of local and remote schools. " (P21)

Although our education system offers a flexible structure according to these different needs, physical, economic, social, and cultural conditions lead to deficiencies at this point (P4)

Since language and culture commonality is targeted, it can be said that it is a system based on the language and culture of the majority. Therefore, single language and dominant culture seem to be more dominant." (P12)

Contribution of Education System to Equality/Social Justice and Reasons

In the education system's contribution to equality/social justice, the participants expressed their opinions about the code "not contributing". As reasons, the participants noted 7 different subcodes: disregard for differences (P15, P19); inadequate application to real life (P5, P22); sovereign opinions (P11, P14); private school concept (P7); prevention of discrimination (P11); free education right (P20); positive discrimination (P20). Some statements of the participants are as follows:

"Our country has a severe gap/inequality regarding the opportunities offered to students from upper and lower socio-economic levels, their opportunities, and access to educational opportunities. This situation is reflected in all educational processes." (P19)

"The education system aims to raise uniform individuals. There is no dialogue, and the rights of minorities in society are not respected. For one thing, tolerance and empathy for differences are not taught." (K14).

However, some participants expressed that the education system contributes to equality/social justice (P5, P11). The statements are as follows:

"At least when I look at the curricula, I see that this issue is important." (P5)
"Yes. I think that the education system serves this issue." (P11)

Social Change and Development by the Education System

Parallel to the participants' statements, social change and development by the education system category in the theme of evaluation of the education system was defined with 3 different codes. These are; "not paving the way" (P2, P6, P19, P25, P23, P14) and "paving the way" (P4, P20, P16). The participants who gave a negative answer to this question listed the following reasons for this mindset: the education system is far from tolerance, the teacher's fault, and the system is insufficient. Some of the participants' statements are as follows:

"It seems more accurate to answer "partially yes" to this question. Because, although not at the expected level, there is a social development and of course, the knowledge and skills acquired through education have an impact on this development. " (P16)

"Of course, I do not. On the contrary, I think it leads to standardization and uniformization, polarises, and is an education system that is entirely far from tolerance and tolerance." (P14)

Views on the Sovereign Social Structure and Political Views

Views on the sovereign social structure and political views category in the theme of evaluation of the education system were defined with 3 different codes: transmitting dominant views through education (P11, P25), blocking critical thinking (P10, P15), the existence of both positive and negative features (P2). Some of the statements of the participants are as follows:

"*Every social structure that dominates humanity has positive and negative features. For this reason, I think the liberal-conservative structure dominant in our society has positive and negative features*."
(P2)

"I think that this dominance unfortunately prevents the development of the critical and questioning perspective that critical pedagogy wants students to gain." (P10)

Evaluation of Teachers

The education system evaluation theme was examined according to the participants' views. Evaluation of teachers' themes has been examined under 2 different categories. These are the contributions of teachers to students and the intellectual background of teachers. The hierarchical code subcodes model is shown in Figure 3.
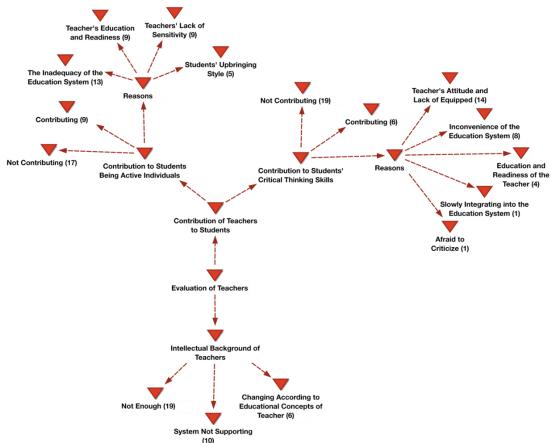

Figure 3: Evaluation of Teachers' Hierarchical Code-Subcodes Model

As shown in Figure 3. the evaluation of teachers' themes has been examined under 2 categories. These are the contributions of teachers to students and the intellectual background of teachers.

Contribution of Teachers to Students

In line with the statements of the participants, the contribution of teachers to students category in the theme of evaluation of teachers was defined with 2 different subcategories. These are contributions to students' being

active individuals and contributions to students' critical thinking skills. Some participants support that teachers can not contribute to the students' being active in the learning process due to the teacher's education system (P3, P26), readiness, teachers' lack of sensitivity (P22, P25), and students' upbringing style (P8, P17) and inadequacy of the education system (P6, P20). On the other hand, some participants think that teachers can contribute to students gaining the required skills (P18, P24). Some statements of the participants are as follows:

> "Yes, in most of them, students are given good responsibility sharing" (P18)

> "As educators who want to contribute, of course, I would like to impact the process positively. However, I also know this will not be possible within the current system and programs." (P6)

In the category of contribution to students' critical thinking skills, the participants expressed their opinions in 3 different codes. These are; "not contributing" (P6, P7, P13, P15, P22, P26) and "contributing" (P9, P20, P2). The participants assert that teachers cannot contribute because of the inconvenience of the education system (P7, P26), teachers' attitudes and lack of experience (P6, P15), and the intellectual background of the teacher (P3, P7). Some of the participant's statements are as follows:

> "No, I do not think so.. There is an understanding of education in the context of just doing homework-memorize-prepare for the exam" (P22)

> "For the reasons I have just mentioned, my answer is no. Because educators should, first of all, have this skill themselves. " (K15)

> "Yes. Teachers do not anticipate all education-related situations; they are directly in those situations. They are in a struggle with the difficulties encountered. I think teachers are the ones who can develop the most important solution suggestions. Teachers are the ones who can identify problems the best." (P9)

In accordance with the statements of the participants, views on the intellectual background of teachers in the theme of evaluation of teachers were defined with 3 different codes. These are "not enough"" (P2, P7), the system is not supporting" (P19, P26), and "changing according to the educational concepts of the teacher" (P5, P 22). Some statements of the participants are as follows:

> "I do not think that teachers/educators in our education system have sufficient intellectual knowledge to support social transformations." (P2)
> "I think that teachers/educators do not have the intellectual knowledge to support social transformations because, unfortunately, we do not have teachers who read and research." (P7)

Evaluation of Curricula and Materials
The last theme of the study, the evaluation of curricula and materials hierarchical code-subcodes model, is shown in Figure 4.
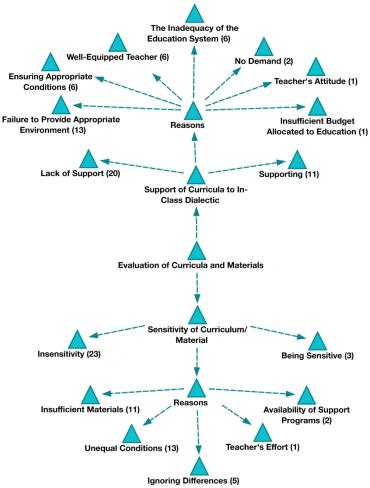
Figure 5: Evaluation of Curricula and Materials Hierarchical Code-Subcodes Model

The curricula and materials theme evaluation has been examined under 2 different categories: "sensitivity of curriculum/material" and "support of curricula to in-class dialectic." Considering the participants' statements, the sensitivity of the curriculum/material category in the theme of evaluation of curricula and materials was defined with 3 different codes. These are insensitivity, being sensitive, and reasons. The participants mentioned that the curricula and materials applied/used in schools are not sensitive to problems such as social-cultural equality and the oppressed/discrimination (P12, P17). However, some participants assert they are sensitive to these problems (P7, P18). 5 different subcodes define the reasons. These are unequal conditions (P5, P13), insufficient materials (P12, P20), ignoring differences (P16, P18), availability of support programs (P24), and teacher's effort (P7).

> "No. Because the programs are prepared jointly and centrally for the whole country." (P16)
> "No. At least I think that the opportunities of educational institutions in urban and rural areas are not equal." (P5)

The support of curricula to in-class dialectic category in evaluating curricula and materials was defined with 3 codes. These are lack of support, support, and reasons. The participants stated that the curriculum and materials applied/used in schools do not support in-class dialectical teaching where students can freely express their thoughts (P11, P14). The reasons for this are failure to provide an appropriate environment (P12, P24), ensuring appropriate conditions (P6, P23), well-equipped teachers (P3, P10), the inadequacy of the education system (P9, P22), no demand (P9, P26), insufficient budget allocated to education (P9), teacher's attitude (P23). Some participants' statements are as follows:

> "The achievement of the objectives of the curricula is largely related to the professional and personal equipment of the teachers." (P3)

"No, in general terms, since the education system in Turkey is oriented towards memorization, the curricula and materials do not support a teaching based on in-class dialectics where students can freely express their thoughts." (P22)

RESULTS and DISCUSSION

The results show that the questioning stance was the participants' most frequently used definition of critical pedagogy. Then, having a libertarian viewpoint, concentrating on equality, the efficiency and the design of the educational system, problem-solving, and being anti-traditional come forefront, respectively. Three participants claimed that they were unfamiliar with the notion of critical pedagogy. Individual institutions, individual capital, individual society, and individual education relationships based on individual freedom are the essential emphases of pedagogy (Yıldırım, 2011). In this context, critical pedagogy embraces education as an empowering instrument and a place where students grow their knowledge and abilities, thereby reducing the repressive systems they require and enabling their freedom (Saunders & Wong, 2020). Logically, the participants identify the concept of critical pedagogy with a questioning perspective and an emancipatory mindset in this setting. Freire (2019) states that critical pedagogy aims to abolish social injustices and give oppressed people freedom. The politicization of the education system, a problem-defining education strategy based on discussion, and a creative, libertarian education approach outside of traditional education are some of the major emphases in critical pedagogy (Memduhoğlu et al., 2022). Given these emphases, the participants' answers are akin to the literature's essential concept of pedagogy. On the other hand, some participants may have never heard of the idea before because, while critical methods have been examined in numerous studies, few studies in the literature integrate these viewpoints under the concept of critical pedagogy.

While most participants negatively evaluated the education system's responsiveness to differentiated needs, some participants stated that the education system responds to differentiated needs. On the other hand, some participants expressed that they had no opinion on this issue. The participants stated the reasons for the responsiveness of the education system to differentiated needs as focusing on a common language/culture, the structure of the educational approach, taking local factors into account, valuing education, and providing relevant diplomas. The legal basis of the Turkish education system consists of the constitution, laws regulating education and training, government programs, development plans, and national education councils (Memduhoğlu, 2019). As can be understood from the legal basis of the education system, the state has control over education. The state determines all standards, curriculum, course hours, alphabet, and the language of instruction (Başdemir, 2012). However, the fact that a central authority manages the education system brings along the situation that individual and regional needs cannot be met locally. The participants may have considered that the education system does not respond to differentiating needs by evaluating in this context. Nevertheless, in the studies conducted, it is stated that our education system is inefficient in the face of change and transformation (Gedikoğlu, 2005), our education system is insufficient to train manpower equipped with the requirements of the age (Buhur et al., 2022), curricula are applied as standard in all schools affiliated to the Ministry of National Education, individual, regional and local needs are not taken into account (Han, 2021), and there are political effects on the education system (Hareket et al., 2016). In this regard, it can be put forward that the studies in the literature are consistent with the research results. As a result of the study, some participants stated that local factors were considered in elective course implementation and values education. However, in the research conducted, it is pointed out that there are problems such as lack of materials, insufficient physical space, parents' lack of knowledge about elective courses, insufficient teachers, students having little influence in determining the course, and not taking the courses seriously (İpek, 2017). On the other hand, values education, which started with moral education in the history of Turkish education (Yıldırım & Demirel, 2019), started to take place in different course contents in all curricula over time, and the Ministry of National Education published a directive on values education. Nonetheless, the studies (Cice & Özgan, 2007; Önal et al., 2023) assert that values education practices are insufficient, families' indifference, curriculum intensity, media, and technological developments affect these practices. In this context, although values education is an important factor in responding to differentiating needs in terms of the education system, it can be stated that there are some problems in practice. Most participants stated that the education system does not contribute to social justice/equality. The participants expressed that the education system contributes to social justice/equality through free education and preventing discrimination. However, the education system does

not contribute to social justice/equality within the scope of disregard for differences, dominant views, inadequate practices in real life, private school concepts, and positive discrimination towards some groups. The principles of generality and equality, the needs of the individual and society, the right to education, equality of opportunity and opportunity, which are among the basic principles of the Turkish education system, can be considered as regulations that prevent discriminatory practices in the education system and ensure social justice and equality. Yet, some problems may be encountered when putting the written grounds into practice. In their study, Polat and Boydak-Özdan (2020) figured out that there is no equality of opportunity in the Turkish education system, the expansion of private schools is a negative situation in terms of equality of opportunity and opportunity, the inequality of opportunity and opportunity arising from the socio-economic status of the family is not eliminated, Şahin (2019) found that central exams and the changing capital of the family reveal inequality of opportunity and opportunity. On the other hand, in the studies (Adak & Koç, 2022; Ülger, 2021; Şahin-İpek et al., 2020), it is highlighted that when face-to-face education was interrupted during the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020, students had insufficient access to the internet and technological facilities. Thus, the education system's contribution to social justice and equality cannot be achieved in times of crisis that require urgent solutions. Another issue mentioned by the participants is positive discrimination towards some groups. These groups are refugees and migrants. Although necessary legal arrangements have been made for these groups to access education, the studies (Büyükhan & Karagöl, 2021; Taştan & Çelik, 2017) display that migrant children have problems accessing education. In this context, although legal grounds reveal a positive approach, the reasons such as the economic situation of migrant and refugee children, the support of their families, the place of residence, and social pressures can negatively affect their access to education. When the participants' answers regarding the status of social change and development provided by the education system are analyzed, most state that it is not provided. At the same time, some participants noted that the education system leads to social change and development. When the reasons stated by the participants are analyzed, poor quality of the education system, inadequacy of teachers, and fear are emphasized as the reasons for negative evaluations, while supporting change and development and the quality of education are emphasized as positive evaluations. The participants who evaluated the education system as poor quality pointed out that the education system is mostly structured on maintaining the existing structure and that there is no democracy and freedom. The present result coincides with the study by Kesik and Bayram (2015). In this study, it was concluded that the education system protects and maintains the existing social structure instead of realizing a transformation; the over-centralized and status quo nature of the education system, the lack of opportunities for change, and the fact that teachers, although they have a vital role, stand behind this transformation create obstacles to transformation. One of the important results of the research is the emphasis on teacher insufficiency. In this emphasis, it was underlined that development and change are included in the written bases. However, it would not make sense without the support of teachers, one of the executors of the education system. The study conducted by Erdoğan and Dündar (2016) supports this finding. In this study, it was concluded that teachers were not open to innovation and different practices. Fear is another category expressed by the participants. It was highlighted that the education system leads to uniformization and polarization and that teachers are afraid to speak. The last category that emerged in line with the participants' views on evaluating the education system is the dominant social structure and political views. In this category, the participants mostly emphasized transmitting dominant views through education. Preventing critical thinking is another idea expressed by the participants. One participant expressed that there are both positive and negative characteristics. It is stated that there is a strong relationship between education and politics in Turkey; governments that come to office make radical changes in education in line with their ideological concerns and try to impose their views through education. In this regard, the policies implemented in education are not long-lasting. This situation may cause stakeholders to distrust the system (Kara, 2020). Gür and Çelik (2009) uncovered similar findings in their study and noted that a qualified and sustainable policy was not adopted in the Turkish education system. All these can negatively affect the education system and prevent critical thinking, as stated by the participants. As one of the 21st-century skills, critical thinking is considered a primary goal in terms of quality education (Önal & Erişen, 2019). Critical thinking skill also included in the legal basis of the Turkish education system, was also emphasized in the curriculum implemented in 2005. It is important that critical thinking, which is also included in the Ministry of National Education 2023 education vision (MoNE, 2018), is exhibited by teachers. In this direction, a critical and analytical thinking course was included as an elective course in teacher education programs in 2018 by

the Council of Higher Education in the pre-service education of teachers (YÖK, 2018). Despite all these regulations, the participants stated that critical thinking was prevented. As a matter of fact, Can and Sezer (2022) examined the educational indicators in public schools in Turkey between 2000 and 2021. As a result of their study, it was asserted that educational investments in Turkey have created quantitative improvements in the Turkish education system over the years but not fully reflected in quality. In this sense, it can be put forth that it will not be possible to progress and develop a critical perspective as long as there are political factors in the education system.

Another theme obtained in the study is the evaluation of teachers. The participants evaluated teachers regarding their contribution to students and their intellectual background. Teachers' contribution to students was expressed as their contribution to students' becoming active individuals and their contribution to students' critical thinking skills. Teachers' contribution to students' becoming effective individuals was evaluated negatively by most participants. Some participants expressed that teachers did not include practices that would make students active due to the education system. They could not do this even if they wanted to because the curriculum was too intense. Although the curriculum to be implemented in the Turkish education system is determined by the Ministry of National Education, how the lessons will be taught during the course hours and the methods and techniques to be used are at the initiative of the teachers. In this case, it can be uttered that no matter how intense the curriculum is, teachers can use practices that will make students active. As a matter of fact, some participants associated the situation of making students active with the training and readiness of the teacher. Another issue mentioned by the participants is the upbringing of the students. It was noted that children who were raised to take their own responsibility were more active in the learning process. Responsibility as a life skill is important for children to gain self-discipline in their success throughout their lives (Taşdemir & Dağıstan, 2014). In addition to supporting individuals academically, understanding self-discipline can enable individuals to organize many areas of their lives (Erzurumlu-Ceyan & Erdem, 2022). In this context, it can be propounded that it is important to create environments where children can take responsibility first in family life and then in academic life. It can be said that teachers' approach is an important factor in the child's academic life, but the family should not be ignored in terms of the approach to raising children. Critical pedagogy recognizes that students should not be passive listeners but active participants in their own education. They are seen as critical research partners who enter into dialogue with the teacher (Freire, 2006). Critical pedagogy recognizes the importance of developing strong, professional teachers committed to continuous self-improvement. The teacher's role is not simply to transmit knowledge but to encourage students to move from a passive position to active engagement in the learning process. Critical educators recognize that curriculum design must consider the social, educational, and societal dynamics that shape the lives of their students. The views of the participants on the contribution of teachers to students' critical thinking were mostly negative. In other words, most participants stated that teachers do not contribute to students' critical thinking. Yet some participants note that teachers contribute to students' critical thinking. The participants who negatively evaluated the contribution of teachers to students' critical thinking stated that critical thinking is a high-level skill that it is difficult to teach it, and that they even have problems in teaching even thinking. In positive evaluations, it was enounced that the teacher could contribute in line with the training received by the teacher rather than directly contributing. The main reasons given by the participants for their views were the teacher's attitude and lack of equipment. It was depicted that without this attitude in the teacher, it would not be possible to enable the student to think critically. It can be expressed that teachers' attitudes and behaviors have an important effect on the success of the education system and students. As a matter of fact, Munck (2007) found in his study that inquiry-based science teaching increased the student's questioning success. In this context, it can be keynoted that teachers should act within the framework of the basic approaches of the education system. Another reason uttered by the participants is the inadequacy of the education system in providing critical thinking skills. Raising constructive, creative, productive individuals with the power of scientific thinking, which is among the general aims of Turkish National Education, basically points to qualified thinking and, thus, the importance of critical thinking (Karakuş, 2009). In this regard, a curriculum development process was initiated in the Turkish education system in 2004 in line with the new and contemporary trends in the world based on the constructivist approach, and the curriculum based on high-level thinking skills such as critical thinking was put into practice in 2005 (Erdoğan et al., 2014). However, in their study, Alkın-Şahin and Gözütok (2013) pointed out that the program aims to develop students' critical thinking skills and sub-skills such as "analyzing, evaluating, interpreting, inferring," but critical thinking skills

alone will not be sufficient for understanding and explaining critical thinking and raising individuals who think critically as a result of educational activities. In this sense, it can be conceived that many factors are important in gaining critical thinking skills in students and that an understanding that is incomplete, groundless, and without infrastructure will not be effective in gaining critical thinking skills. Some of the participants stated that the teacher's education and readiness are factors in helping students gain critical thinking skills. Although the curriculum is organized in this context, no benefit may be achieved if the teacher does not plan the applications to gain critical thinking skills. Even though critical thinking is emphasized in constructivist education, some participants stated that its integration into the education system is slow. This situation can be interpreted as the change being made in writing, but it may take some time in practice. One of the participants expressed that teachers could not create gains in terms of critical thinking for students due to the fear of criticism. The fact that teachers, who play an important role in the education system in the information and technology age we are in, cannot express themselves and share their thoughts, and in this context, the fear of criticism can be considered remarkable. The intellectual background of the teachers was mostly not considered sufficient by the participants in evaluating teachers within the scope of critical pedagogy. In today's information society, in addition to acquiring knowledge, it is necessary to produce knowledge and use it effectively and correctly. In this regard, the qualifications that individuals should have can change daily. In line with the age requirements, individuals are expected to be intellectual with analytical thinking, synthesis, problem-solving skills, effective communication, knowing where and how to obtain information, and critical thinking skills (Özsevgeç & Aytar, 2014). The teaching profession has an important role in the development of society. For the teacher to fulfill this role, firstly, good pre-service training should be provided. Then, conditions and various opportunities should be created to enable the teacher to devote himself/herself to the job (Sağlam & Çiçek-Sağlam, 2005). Considering the effects of teachers, who are defined as the architects of the future, on the development of the country, training qualified manpower, ensuring peace and social peace in the society, socializing individuals and preparing them for social life, and transferring the culture and values of the society to young generations (Çelikten et al., 2005), the importance of their intellectual background will be understood. The reason why the participants do not find the intellectual background of teachers sufficient may be the instability in the education and employment of teachers, the most important element of our education system. In addition to the teacher appointments made from outside the education faculties for years (Çelikten et al., 2005), today, providing the opportunity for students studying in different faculties to take formation courses from the second grade onwards and opening the path of teaching to everyone studying in different departments of various faculties may affect the quality of pre-service education of teachers. The personal rights of in-service teachers may also affect their realization of the teaching profession. However, in the research (Tok, 1997; Sağlam & Çiçek-Sağlam, 2005; Bozbayındır, 2019), it is stated that the personal rights of teachers are insufficient and the financial return is low. All these factors may affect teachers' intellectual accumulation. The participants stated that the curricula and materials did not support classroom dialogue and could not respond to the differentiated needs of students. Freire based his theory of critical pedagogy on the dialogic approach. The dialogic approach refers to a two-way dialogue between students and teachers. Curricula should increase student-teacher communication and respond to the needs of students. It is supported by studies that the curriculum in the Turkish education system ignores multiculturalism (Arslan, 2009.). Similarly, there is a lack of collaborative partnership between professional staff and teachers in Turkey and no provision for feedback or systematic in-service training (Çobanoglu et al., 2018). There is also a need for improved educational supervision (Memduhoğlu et al., 2007) and innovative management in education, policy, program, and curriculum (Güçlü Yılmaz, 2021). It is clear that these educational programs are not effective enough in improving student achievement (Kurt, 2013.) and that more needs to be done to improve the system's efficiency.

Declarations

Conflict of Interest

No potential conflicts of interest were disclosed by the author(s) with respect to the research, authorship, or publication of this article.

Ethics Approval

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Research and Publication Ethics Statement

The study was approved by the research team's university ethics committee of Van Yüzüncü Yıl University (Approval Number/ID: 08/09/2020- 2020/09-14) Hereby, I as the author, consciously assure that for the manuscript, the following is fulfilled:

- This material is the author's own original work, which has not been previously published elsewhere.
- The paper reflects the author's own research and analysis in a truthful and complete manner.
- The results are appropriately placed in the context of prior and existing research.
- All sources used are properly disclosed.

Contribution Rates of Authors to the Article

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