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Teacher educators' perceptions and challenges of using critical pedagogy: A case study of higher teacher education in Tanzania

Abstract

This study investigates teacher educators' perceptions of and challenges affecting the use of critical pedagogy in higher teacher education in Tanzania. The study employed a qualitative case study design and collected in-depth data through semi-structured interviews and direct classroom observations. The findings showed that critical pedagogy is a significant approach for developing students' abilities to do critical reflection. However, critical pedagogy demands building a friendly relationship with students and encouraging dialogic interactions; all these lead to critical reflection in return, ensuring better understanding of the subject content. Most importantly, the findings report several challenges related to the presence of crowded classes, the use of lecturing teaching style and the use of English as a language of instruction, the use of unsuitable assessment format that is university guided and lack of teaching resources. These challenges impede the effective use of critical pedagogy in teaching. To overcome such challenges, policy makers and institutional leaders need to rethink of providing teaching resources and encouraging the use of critical pedagogy in teaching and learning at higher teacher education programmes. The study concludes that by practising what teacher educators perceive to be critical pedagogy, classrooms will be transformed into places of liberation. Further, while this qualitative study does not intend to make any generalisation, the findings might be of interest to international teacher educators who are interested in employing the critical pedagogy approach effectively.

Keywords

critical pedagogy, higher teacher education, Tanzania, teacher educators

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Introduction

Investigating issues related to 'critical pedagogy' has attracted the attention of many scholars (e.g. Clark, 2018; Freire, 2010, 2013; Hooks, 2010; Kavenuke, 2020; Kinyota & Kavenuke, 2018) in many different contexts. In a general sense, critical pedagogy is an approach that calls for the cultural contradictions experienced in everyday life to be interrogated for the betterment of the society (Jeyaraj & Harland, 2014). In teaching, critical pedagogy encourages the use of problem-posing techniques in order to allow and motivate students to question the knowledge they receive (Freire, 2010; Hooks, 2010; Jeyaraj & Harland, 2014; Kinyota & Kavenuke, 2018). As students question the received knowledge, they develop critical thinking skills such as skepticism and self-confidence (Kavenuke et al., 2020). Also, critical pedagogy encourages students to examine power structures and challenge what they are taught. This notion is similar to Freire's idea of criticising classroom domination by a teacher educator and encouraging ideas of students as challengers in a fight for the freedom to have their own thoughts be a valid conversation in the learning space. According to Freire (2010), critical pedagogy helps students to recognise the connections between their problems and experiences and the social contexts where they live in. Teaching using critical pedagogy is important in inculcating a critical spirit among students (Pacho, 2013) since it allows students to engage with the content being taught (Matthews, 2014). It also gives room for students to challenge the status quo and examine the power structures in the environment wherein they live. In line with this, critical pedagogy helps students to reach a level of critical consciousness—a level in which any idea is subjected to analysis (Freire, 2010, 2013). Despite this positive discussion on critical pedagogy, we believe that the application of critical pedagogy demands of teacher educators not only to have acquired teaching professionalism but also to have a strong passion for teaching and the development of their students' critical, creative thinking skills. Further, the application of critical pedagogy in teaching demands a systematic planning which is discussed in our findings. Below we discuss the critical pedagogy theory of Freire.

Literature and Background

Paulo Freire's Critical Pedagogy Theory: A Theoretical Framework

Critical pedagogy is traced back to the time of Socrates and Plato who recognised the importance of dialogue and reflection in education (Guilherme, 2017). Socrates emphasised the approach of teaching that is dialogic and reflective. For instance, he challenged his student Plato to think critically about educational and social issues (Guilherme, 2017). In fact, it is this component 'to think critically about educational and social issues' that makes critical pedagogy important since it enhances the critical thinking spirit of students. Thus, there is a close link between critical pedagogy, dialogue, and reflection because- before making any critical dialogue on the topic under discussion- people tend to reflect. It is this link that makes many scholars extrapolate that dialogue and reflection are indispensable to critical pedagogy (Aksikas, Andrews & Hendrick, 2019; Freire, 2010; Hooks, 2010; Guilherme, 2017; Matthews, 2014).

Using critical pedagogy in teaching and learning is associated with certain expectations concerning the use of education for solving problems and transforming societies (Freire, 2010; Guilherme, 2017; Matthews, 2014). This means that the transformational role of critical pedagogy is not expected to end in the classroom context; rather, it has to extend to improving various aspects of the wider community. However, in many societies, these expectations have not been realised mainly due to the nature of the dominant teaching approach(es) used in the provision of education. Based on Freire's concept of 'banking education', Guilherme (2017) points out that it is 'banking education' that has led to the failure to meet these expections in many societies, that is, the failure of education to play its role of transforming societies. Given the unidirectional nature of banking education which requires teacher educators to teach and students to listen (Freire, 2010), the transformational role of education is subjected to doubt. In our own interpretations, this may happen mainly because the approach makes students good at

storing the packages received from teacher educators without making an analysis of how the received content can be used to resolve problems happening in their societies.

Paulo Freire's critical pedagogy theory is guided by a number of premises. Firstly, education should use a dialogic approach to decision making (Freire, 2010, 2013; Hooks, 2010). Freire believed that dialogic approach to learning engages students in a meaningful communication that reduces teacher educator-student division. Secondly, the central role of education is, and indeed should be 'praxis' (Freire, 2010, 2013). In this case, teacher educators have a duty to enable students to reflect and take action. Thus, students should be taught in such a way that they use the knowledge obtained in the classroom to reflect and act in real life situations. Thirdly, education should be critical and empowering (Freire, 2010, 2013; Hooks, 2010). Freire's critical pedagogy focuses on fostering critical thoughts. And in this respect, the role of the teacher educators should focus on preparing students with inquiring mind in order to develop their critical and independent thinking. Fourthly, education provided should undermine the power of oppression and serve the cause of liberation (Freire, 2010, 2013; Hooks, 2010). This means that education provided has to liberate the holistic individual human. To Freire, liberating education, among others, is possible through resolving the teacher educator-student contradiction in which the former is regarded as the knowledge depositor and the latter is the knowledge repository (Freire, 2010). Fifthly, education plays a transformative role (Freire, 2010, 2013). Freire is of the view that in order to transform the world, there is a need for people to be critical enough and be able to reflect and take action since "there is no transformation without action" (Freire, 2010, p. 87).

Additionally, Freire emphasised that as we take action, we basically say a true word. However, he warned that saying a word "is not a privilege of some few persons, but rather the right of everyone" (Freire 2010, p. 88). This means that, in classroom settings, both teacher educators and students have a duty to name the world by contributing to knowledge production. In other words, none of them has the right to speak on behalf of others or has the right to deny others the right to speak. Thus, critical pedagogy allows dialogic, reflective and action-taking oriented teaching as a means of producing students with a critical spirit.

Dialogic Teaching and Reflective Teaching in Critical Pedagogy

The importance of dialogue and reflection has been emphasized in education (Guilherme, 2017; Wang, 2010; Zare & Mukundan, 2015). Also, the two terms are fundamentally important in critical pedagogy as an approach to teaching. It is evident that dialogic and reflective teaching take place where there is love, humility, care and horizontal relationship between the teacher educator and students (Freire, 2010). As described in the earlier sections, these prerequisites for dialogic and reflective teaching to take place are as well the principle tenets of critical pedagogy. In that regard, there is no way critical pedagogy can be separated from dialogue and reflection. As the teacher educators make dialogue and reflect with students on the content that is learnt, they find themselves in deeper discussion. Furthermore, as they engage in dialogue and reflection, teacher educators and students together create a climate for optimal learning (Hooks, 2010).

It is worth noting that the concept of critical pedagogy in relation to dialogue and reflection is traced back to the time of Socrates and Plato (Guilherme, 2017). Socrates emphasised the approach of teaching that is dialogic and reflective in character. For instance, he challenged his student Plato to think critically about educational and social issues (Guilherme, 2017). In fact, it is this component 'to think critically about educational and social issues' that makes critical pedagogy important since it enhances the critical thinking spirit of students. Thus, there is a close link between critical pedagogy, dialogue, and reflection—because before making any critical dialogue on the topic under discussion, people tend to reflect. It is this link that makes many scholars extrapolate that dialogic teaching and reflective teaching are indispensable in critical pedagogy (Aksikas, Andrews & Hendrick, 2019; Freire, 2010; Hooks, 2010; Guilherme, 2017; Matthews, 2014).

Higher Education in Tanzania: Classroom Characteristics and Critical Pedagogy in Teaching

Higher education in Tanzania is traced back to the 1960s when the University of Dar es Salaam (UDSM) was first established as a college of the University of London in 1961. In 1963, the college became a constituent college of the University of East Africa, and in 1970 it advanced to an independent national university (Makulilo 2021; Mkude et al. 2003). It is in the late 1990s and early 2000s when a mushrooming of universities in the country emerged. The emergence of many universities in the country recently has been due to the increased emphasis on privatisation. Mamdani (2009) argued that privatisation went hand in hand with commercialisation where many universities were introduced, and many programmes were established in order to capture the market of the students graduating from high schools.

This, in turn, leads to an increased number of students that keeps affecting the entire teaching and learning activity. Indeed, classrooms in many universities in Tanzania are characterised by a large number of students (Kavenuke 2018). To further exemplify the matter, some scholars have argued that the current overcrowding of classrooms has eventually demoralized teacher educators and students to engage in critical learning (Chachage 2016; Mamdani 2009; Shivji 2009). In that regard, teacher educators have opted for teacher-centred approach or lecture method as an alternative to teaching in such overcrowded classes (Clark 2018; Kavenuke 2018; Pacho 2013).

The Teaching Style in Higher Teacher Education in Tanzania

Teaching is a profession that demands a lot of effort on the part of teacher educators. It can be performed in many ways; however, the most common approaches are (i) student-centred approach and (ii) teacher-centred approach (Clark, 2018; Pacho, 2013). Informed by the constructivist and socio-cultural theories of learning, the student-centred approach considers students as the centre of learning, giving them autonomy to participate in the choice of the learning content and methods (e.g., Sparrow et al., 2000). This makes the role of a teacher educator is simply to guide students and manage and direct students' learning activities (e.g., Emaliana, 2017).

Concerning the teacher-centred approach, a teacher is the focus of the teaching activity, and his/her main role is merely to transfer knowledge to students who are viewed as passive receivers of information/knowledge (Emaliana, 2017, p. 60). In other words, the teacher-centred approach gives teacher educators dominance in classroom, making them the ultimate source of the knowledge transferred to students who ought to be silent receivers (as if knowledge and reality is static and motionless) (Freire, 2010). This way of teaching is equated to the lecturing style that is prevalent in higher teacher education in Tanzania. In such a teaching style, the teacher educators perform as experts while their students are obliged to be good listeners (e.g., Clark, 2018). This teaching style ignores the knowledge and experiences of students. Further, it separates the teacher educators from students, reinforcing a vertical relationship between the two parties (e.g., Clark, 2018; Freire, 2010).

Lecturing remains a common approach to teaching in many universities worldwide (Clark, 2018; Hooks, 2010; Maphosa & Ndebele, 2017; Muthanna, 2011; Muthanna & Karaman, 2014; Webster, 2015). Tanzanian universities are no exception; lecturing is the most common approach to teaching in Tanzanian higher teacher education (Kavenuke, 2018; Pacho, 2013; Paulo, 2014a). Among others, limited access to internet and international databases is a barrier to the use of critical pedagogy in classrooms (e.g. Muthanna & Sang, 2019). In Tanzanian higher teacher education, teacher educators use the lecturing style for several reasons. For instance, lecturing is routinely adopted as a part of the organisational culture, meaning that teacher educators use lecturing even in contexts where other more engaging approaches could be employed (Kavenuke, 2018). Also, the lecturing style is used as a way to simplify teaching in large classes while striving to cover the overloaded (content) curriculum (Kavenuke, 2018; Paulo, 2014a).

Understanding How Critical Pedagogy Can Impact the Tanzanian Classrooms

The proper use of critical pedagogy at any level of education can move students toward deeper professional dialogue and reflection (Alarcon, 2016; Freire, 2010, 2013; Hooks, 2010). Furthermore, adopting critical pedagogy in teaching and learning can lead to meaningful classroom experiences that place social issues at the centre of the classroom discussion (Alarcon, 2016). The approach helps students not to avoid discussing controversial issues arising in the classrooms. In this way, using critical pedagogy fosters courageous conversations. As we discuss to look for solutions, we build up a learning community that honors classroom differences (Alarcon, 2016; Hooks, 2010). Below we mention the purpose of the present study.

Method

Purpose of the Study

Despite the importance of critical pedagogy, the approach has minimally been used in many universities. As such, the lecturing style remains dominant in the teaching profession (Clark, 2018; Freire, 2010; Hooks, 2010; Muthanna, 2016). Meanwhile, there have been some efforts in the recent educational reforms that emphasize the use of the learner-centred approaches in teaching (Schweisfurth, 2011). However, critical pedagogy goes beyond the doctrines of the learner-centred approaches. It further helps students to develop the ability to critique the content they are learning (Freire, 2010; Hooks, 2010; Kinyota & Kavenuke, 2018). Nonetheless, the topic of critical pedagogy and its application in Tanzanian higher teacher education is under-researched. Therefore, this study is significant as it explores teacher educators' perceptions of critical pedagogy and the challenges they face while using this approach in their teaching. Therefore, in this paper, we focus on answering the following two research questions: (i) how do teacher educators perceive critical pedagogy? and (ii) what challenges do teacher educators encounter while using the critical pedagogy approach?

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative case study design, which focuses on studying phenomena as they occur in real-life situations (Yin, 2018), and allows participants to voice their perceptions and thoughts in the form of narratives and/or self-reflections (Given, 2008). In collecting in-depth data on teacher educators' perceptions related to the concept 'critical pedagogy' and the challenges they encounter while employing critical pedagogy in teaching, we employed semi-structured interviews and direct classroom observations. In adhering to ethical considerations, prior to collecting data, the authors requested the participants to fill in a consent form that assured them of confidentiality (Hett & Hett, 2013; Shamim & Qureshi, 2013).

The authors developed a semi-structured interview guide which is essential for collecting in-depth data as it keeps participants on topic (Bryman, 2012; Muthanna, 2019), and gives an opportunity to the interviewers to ask further questions based on the responses from the participants (Muthanna, 2019). The semi-structured interviews were of two phases. The first phase focused on gathering general information from Tanzanian teacher educators with a focus on their general use of 'critical pedagogy' in their teaching and most importantly on identifying participants who consider themselves as critical pedagogues.

With a continuation of face-to-face, audio-recorded interviews (each interview took between 20 to 25 minutes), the primary author interviewed seventeen (17) participants at their offices. By listening to the interviews, this first phase resulted in recruiting only three participants for this study as they informed of their being critical pedagogues. It was assumed that these teacher educators have rich information related to critical pedagogy compared to the rest of the participants involved in the first phase. Thus, the fact that the three participants were of the same age range, similar years of teaching experience and level of education was not an indicator of anything related to this study.

With the use of the first phase interviews, we could also avoid asking general questions (we employed in the first phase) and then focus on asking critical questions that helped in exploring perceptions of what constitutes critical pedagogy, along with the challenges encountered while using critical pedagogy in teaching. Furthermore, the primary author interviewed three teacher educators in the second phase. Although the number of participants is limited, this qualitative study does not intend to make any generalisations (Lincoln & Guba 1985; Wellington 2015). Moreover, the recruitment of the three participants was useful in systematic and in-depth collection of data (Muthanna & Miao 2015). The interviews in the second phase were also face-to-face, audio-recorded and took around 35 to 40 minutes. The following table describes the characteristics of the study participants.

Table 1

Demographic characteristics of study participants

Pseudo names	Nationality	Educational Level	Areas of Specialty	Years of Teaching in Higher Teacher Education	Age Range	Main Teaching Course
Kefren	Tanzanian	PhD	Educational Foundations	11^{+}	50-55	International and Comparative Education
Smith	Tanzanian	PhD	Curriculum and Teaching	11^{+}	50-55	Computer Literacy for Teachers
Luis	Tanzanian	PhD	Educational Psychology	11^{+}	50-55	Research Methods in Education

To strengthen our data, we also employed direct classroom observations by focusing on both the teaching activities and the physical settings in which the activities were taking place (Angrosino & Rosenberg, 2011). The primary author observed teacher educators teaching their main teaching courses (Table 1) in the natural setting. The use of observations helped us to obtain documentary information reflecting the participants' personal viewpoints on what is observed (Tedlock, 2008). Observations also helped the researchers to explore the challenges the teacher educators encounter when using critical pedagogy.

The central focus of observations was on how teacher educators teach using critical pedagogy in their natural settings. Further, the observations also helped us understand whether the participants' interview statements (on how they teach using critical pedagogy and any challenges they encounter) were realized in reality. While the size of each observed class ranges between 190 and 250 students, the study participants also shared their recent experiences of teaching classes that contain around 1500 students in one class.

We designed a checklist to guide us in the observational process. The checklist contained several items related to how teacher educators perceive 'critical pedagogy', ask critical questions, engage students in discussion and reflection, and encourage students to ask critical questions. Moreover, the checklist contained items related to the nature of the classrooms, the language of instruction used, the approximate number of students in one class and the extent of students' engagement in classroom discussions. As a non-participant sitting at the back of the class, the primary author conducted observations by ticking on each observational statement. Actions not stated in our observational checklists were also written down. For example, the observer noticed that students raise their hands when attempting to answer a question and/or provide their reflections. The following table describes the dates and hours of the observations.

Table 2

Information on classroom observation

Pseudo names	Observation date & time length (in hours)							
	Date	Hrs	Date	Hrs	Date	Hrs	Date	Hrs
Kefren	2nd June 2020	2	9th June 2020	2	16th June 2020	1	23rd June 2020	1
Smith	4th June 2020	2	11th June 2020	1	18th June 2020	1	25th June 2020	2
Luis	5th June 2020	1	12th June 2020	2	19th June 2020	2	26th June 2020	1

For the data interpretation, the authors employed the grounded theory in coding and decoding the data (e.g., Charmaz, 2014; Bowen, 2009; Saldana, 2009). In details, the primary author transcribed the interviews, and wrote down the observational data in a notebook, and then combined the collected data in separate files (Muthanna, 2019). The primary author started extensively reading the transcripts and highlighting some texts and concepts. This procedure is a method of categorising the data into smaller chunks (open coding). This open coding helped the primary author organize the highlighted concepts and texts from each transcript and combine them into a new file for comparisons.

After reading the selected texts and concepts, the two authors labelled each selected text (axial coding). Further extensive reviews of the data enabled comparisons of the coded segments, which led us to select the core categories among the many identified ones (selective coding): (i) teacher educators' perceptions of 'critical pedagogy'; and (ii) challenges affecting the use of critical pedagogy in higher teacher education. Each category contained important themes. In details, the first category contained these themes: a friendly relationship with students, dialogic teaching, and reflective teaching. The second category also contained these significant themes: class size, lecturing style and language of instruction used, teaching resources, and assessment mode. We also used some verbatim quotations of the participants' narratives to support the discussion of the themes. Then, both authors reviewed the categories and interpretations several times. The following section presents the major findings of the study.

Findings

The findings are discussed in relation to the major themes: *Teacher Educators' Perceptions of 'Critical Pedagogy'* and *Challenges Affecting the Use of Critical Pedagogy*. Sub-themes are explicated for each theme.

Teacher Educators' Perceptions of 'Critical Pedagogy'

The study revealed the presence of different perceptions of the concept of 'critical pedagogy' and its application in the classroom. The following sub-themes detail the main perceptions.

A friendly relationship with students

Our study participants regarded critical pedagogy as a teaching approach that encourages students to ask critical questions. Learning in a context wherein asking critical questions is allowed gives a room for students to question what is presented by teacher educators. However, enabling students to ask critical questions demands a friendly relationship with students. This is highlighted in the following quotation from one of our participants:

> *Critical pedagogy requires that we [teacher educators] become friendly with our students in order to reduce the teacher educator-student gap that may limit students from being free to interact with us. I always make sure that I am friendly with them. This has made them see me as a fellow adult learner. In that way, students have kept asking me critical questions in the classroom. Many of the questions have helped me to continue changing my beliefs about teaching and learning at universities.* ***Smith***

The friendly relationship with students also helps teacher educators to pose critical questions to their students without making them (students) feel that they are being challenged. By viewing their teacher educators as co-constructors of knowledge, students understand that the purpose of asking critical questions is to further their understanding of the subject matter under discussion.

During classroom observations, Smith kept on asking critical questions to students. The main reason behind such questions was to help students to link their learning with their everyday life experiences. For instance, in the process of defining the term 'computer', Smith requested students to take out their cellular phones, send a message to their friends and see what happens. The question helped students to quickly reflect on the meaning of computer and respond to the questions (that would follow) on describing the functions of computer. In addition, Luis emphasised that asking students critical questions and encouraging them to ask critical questions is an integral part of critical pedagogy. He highlighted that critical pedagogy reminds students that they are not supposed to take things for granted. In other words, critical pedagogy teaches them to ask for clarity even for things that might seem obvious. This is underscored in the following:

> *Teaching that engages a lecturer [teacher educator] in critical pedagogy requires lecturers and students together to learn to ask critical questions, learn to make arguments and be able to question things that seem to be obvious. It is not to take things for granted. The approach helps to break the myth I have seen in some cultures that it is improper for a child [a student] to question the parent [the teacher educator].* ***Luis***

While observing the teacher educator's class, Luis showed consistency in asking thoughtful questions that required well-thought explanations. Allowing students to ask questions encourages them to ask the teacher educator some insightful questions.

Similarly, Kefren related critical pedagogy to the critical nature of the questions asked by teacher educators in the classroom. She reported that she tends to use a question-and-answer technique while emphasizing on the need for the questions to be well-thought-of questions. All this demands a good relationship with students. During classroom observations, Kefren encouraged students to learn to ask critical questions as a critical way of learning.

Dialogic teaching

Critical pedagogy is also associated with dialogic teaching. The study participants perceived dialogic teaching as a prerequisite for critical pedagogy. For instance, Smith acknowledged the power of using dialogue when teaching using critical pedagogy. Despite that awareness, Smith reported that his colleagues do not employ classroom dialogues because they think of themselves as masters of knowledge, and that students do not have valuable information to offer when discussing with teacher educators. To highlight this, Smith underscored as follows:

> *Students have a fear if they make dialogue with lecturers [teacher educators]. I personally find it to be a result of the gap that we tend to put between us and our students. Most of us think that 'We are lecturers'; we tend to close up our eyes and decide not to learn either from our fellow lecturers or from students.* ***Smith***

By observing Smith's class, we witnessed how students were allowed to dialogue with one another for the purpose of clearing any doubt on what the teacher educator has presented. The dialogue was fruitful to the extent that students came up with critical questions. One of the students was heard asking "…, how is it that the mouse does not perform some of the functions when it is hanging on air?" A question such as this came because of using dialogue and made the class active in searching for answers to the question raised.

Kefren reported that she attempts to involve students in dialogue and discussion especially after giving them some videos to watch. She also reported that she usually requests students to dialogue with themselves and with her in order to analyse what they have grasped from the videos they have just watched. In one of her classes, the use of dialogue and discussion was observed. The strategy helped students critique one another. Kefren was acting like her students' fellow learner. This was in line with Luis' view of critical pedagogy as a concept related to dialogic teaching wherein engaging students in discussions enables them to critique the ideas of teacher educators or peers, and the content.

Reflective teaching

Employment of reflective examples is a manifestation of critical pedagogy in teaching. For example, in a reflective way, Smith explained that the computer has mainly two accounts namely 'guest' and 'administrator' accounts. Smith made it clear that the administrator is just like the owner of the house who can do anything in the house, and the guest is typically like a person who visits another person but cannot enter everywhere in the house. The use of such a metaphor makes students think reflectively by relating to, for instance, the role of an administrator in a house and that of an administrator account in a computer. In other words, the teacher educator has motivated students to reflect upon the real-life situation in order to understand the types of accounts of a computer. In line with this thought, Kefren commented that critical pedagogy mirrors itself in reflective teaching. Kefren also states that making teaching more reflective and enabling students to be reflective requires teacher educators to integrate reflective and lived examples in the classroom. Kefren underlined the idea by underscoring that:

> *I am aware that reflective teaching is one of the techniques to put critical pedagogy in practice. Thus, I normally give real life examples or ask reflective questions for students to reflect and learn. I give them lived examples that make them think reflectively, think outside the four angles of the classrooms and be able to take action out of their thinking. For instance, in my course, I have always asked my students to think and tell why many schools in Southern and Northern regions of Tanzania have sweaters and tracksuits as part of uniforms different from the schools located in Dar es Salaam City?* ***Kefren***

Basically, reflective teaching comes in the form of reflective questioning or reflective examples. Reflective questioning such as that of Kefren takes students outside the classroom and makes them think and come up with critical responses. Such questioning also helps students better than telling students about the influence of geographical factors in shaping the education system of a particular context.

Similarly, Luis acknowledged the extant relationship between critical pedagogy and reflective teaching. During classroom observations, Luis taught students by providing reflective examples. Luis provided examples which motivated students to compare the content with real-life situations. When exploring the reasons for providing students with reflective examples, he responded that:

> *Some real-life and reflective examples awaken students to think differently and respond to the questions differently and thus develop a culture of collecting multiple alternatives to solving a problem. The examples go an extra length linking what they*

> *learn with what is outside. I find it interesting when I meet my students and they witness by telling me '... We have missed your real-life and reflective examples in your teaching'.* ***Luis***

The above statement shows that providing reflective examples when teaching makes students remember their teacher educator positively.

Challenges Affecting the Use of Critical Pedagogy

Teacher educators face several challenges while attempting to employ 'critical pedagogy' in their teaching. The following sub-themes detail the main challenges.

Class size

One of the most burning issues is the presence of large classes, which is a drawback that infringes teacher educators' willingness to employ strategies that support critical pedagogy. The study participants reported that they taught both large and small classes. According to our study participants, a class of 190 students is considered as a small class but a class of around 1800 students makes a large class. While the presence of more than 50 students is considered a large class in some contexts, it is not the case in the Tanzanian context where the number of students per class in higher teacher education is far beyond that. This relates to the increasing enrolment that has become the main source of income for universities. Increased enrolment is attributable to the fact that the government has cut off the financial support to universities and, therefore, universities have expanded their enrolment as a way to raise their incomes. This is further reported in the following script:

> *The government has stopped providing monies for running the university. So, students' tuition fees are used as sources of university fund. Yet, I have to honestly tell that a large class size is a serious issue of concern and a burden to us [teacher educators]. Many teacher educators are losing the morale to teach such classes. Only a few, who either have read or researched on critical pedagogy or understand the importance of, and practice critical pedagogy, still strive to actively engage students despite the large class sizes.* ***Kefren***

In support of the preceding quotation, Smith also accentuated that the class size is a challenge for teacher educators to teach using critical pedagogy; however, he still struggles to ensure that his teaching is interactive. He states the following:

> *I understand that class size is an issue of concern. However, I have not taken that as an excuse. To me, even if I have 1800 students [in one class], but I have enough portable and mobile microphones, I can gradually teach them using critical pedagogies. I usually give a microphone to students and I remain with one microphone and I keep moving in the classroom to elicit ideas from students. I have tried this, so, I know it works.* ***Smith***

Our notes from classroom observations reflected a limited use of critical pedagogy by the study participants in large classes. For instance, Smith assured that he has obtained more mobile microphones students can use for communicating and interacting during teaching. This means that the presence of enough mobile microphones could resolve the problem. Nevertheless, the fact is that the microphones were limited, hence, limiting the use of critical pedagogy to its fullest potential.

Lecturing style and language of instruction

The presence of large classes compels teacher educators to adopt the lecturing style in higher teacher education in Tanzania. Implementing such a teaching style makes it challenging for teacher educators to engage all students in discussions. Further, dividing students into small groups takes much of the time allocated for a lecture. Additionally, using critical pedagogy in

teaching is a new style for students, which then makes it hard for them to get along with. Kefren explicitly commented that many students come to university with the perception that lecturing is the common approach of teaching, and thus, the role of the students is to listen and act upon what teacher educators tell them to do. Smith and Luis also supported this reflection, adding that such pre-conceptions of the teaching approach affect students' adoption to the new teaching approach. Smith also stated that:

> *The traditional method of teaching that is dominant in our lower levels of learning despite the emphasis on learner-centred learning has affected our students. They come to university with the same pattern of thinking that the teacher educator has to deliver, and they have to listen. This becomes a challenge when they meet teacher educators who request their engagement in the teaching and learning activities.* ***Smith***

Furthermore, the study participants reported that students' fear of questioning their teacher educators and the developed culture of silence in the classroom as the challenges in integrating critical pedagogies in teaching.

In addition to the large classes and the adoption of the lecturing style, the language of instruction also plays a crucial role in either fostering or hindering the teaching activity, particularly when it comes to using critical pedagogy. English, the language of instruction, is an issue of concern which requires special attention. In Tanzania, English is introduced as a subject in the primary education and is used as an instructional language from secondary to post-secondary education. Given the fact that English is a foreign language that is seldom used in casual conversations outside formal settings (such as schools), it is challenging for students to develop competency in it to the extent of being able to use it for effective learning. This is reflected in the following statement:

> *Tanzanian students enrol in primary schools while they are already conversant with the local languages and Swahili, the national language. With this in mind, it is obvious that these students have already developed the linguistic capabilities in the first language (s). With the belief that language is a tool for communicating our thoughts, I have seen that students with poor command of English face difficulties when requested to take part in dialogue and critical argumentation.* ***Luis***

To make learning meaningful, it was observed that teacher educators (Luis being an example) were code-mixing and code-switching from English to *Swahili*. Although the national regulations stipulate that it is necessary to use English as a medium of instruction, it is sometimes wise to use one's national language in order to bring about better understanding. On this issue, one participant gave out the following statement:

> *I find it useless to stick to policy statements that require us [teacher educators] to use English, when I see my students are not following the lesson and cannot make any dialogue which is important in critical pedagogy. For that reason, dear researchers, I have been code-mixing and code-switching. I witness to you here that I have seen my approach fruitful.* ***Luis***

While abiding by the regulations governing the use of English in teaching is important, it is challenging for some students to understand concepts well when taught by using English. This demands teacher educators to sometimes use the national language to help students understand the content better. As such, based on observations, switching between Swahili and English languages helps students to actively take part in discussions.

Teaching resources

The presence of traditional buildings and large classrooms designed for accommodating as many students as possible is also a barrier to the use of critical pedagogy in the classroom. With

the presence of crowded classes, teacher educators can just decide to adopt the lecturing approach. In this regard, Kefren advised:

> *I think having classrooms which are well resourced, classrooms which give freedom for teacher educators and students to interact among themselves is of paramount. We need classrooms that are in V-shape, semi-circle, U-shape and the like if the university has to encourage teaching using critical pedagogy. It is hard to apply this model in classrooms which have fixed desks and chairs.* ***Kefren***

Observations confirmed that many classrooms had fixed seats, tables with elevated stages where teacher educators have to position themselves when teaching. Classrooms had no interactive whiteboards for students to interact with the media while interrogating the content. Some classrooms had no power-point projectors for teacher educators to display audio and video materials. Moreover, some classrooms had no functioning speakers for students to listen and discuss the content under discussion.

Time, as a resource, is also one of the challenges affecting the use of critical pedagogy. Teaching using critical pedagogy requires sufficient time for students to reflect on the lesson taught. Nevertheless, Smith noted that:

> *Following time limitation, many teacher educators tend to teach to finish up the content they have planned to cover, leaving many students with no or minimal skills developed. I have seen colleagues opting for slides mainly because they serve time and are helpful in covering a large content. But with me, content coverage within the limited time is not a big deal because, I believe by making teaching and learning engaging, students do their part as I do mine.* ***Smith***

The above statement implies the need for reconsidering the contents of the courses and the time for teaching such contents. It also suggests that the focus should shift from quantity teaching to quality teaching. Getting prepared in advance is then necessary on the part of both teacher educators and students.

Assessment mode

Assessment should also go hand in hand with the teaching strategies and techniques. For example, it would be inappropriate to assess remembering skills when a teacher educator employs critical pedagogy in his/her teaching. Critical pedagogy actually demands teacher educators to assess skills such as critical thinking, creative thinking, argumentative skills, and ability to make presentations. However, when a university administration imposes on teacher educators to follow a certain format for preparing assessments, it becomes challenging for teacher educators to assess their students in accordance with the styles adopted for teaching. Such a university examination format has a large portion that focuses on constructing tests, normally measuring lower order thinking skills such as level of recalling as opposed to higher order thinking skills such as analysing, evaluating and creating. This is further highlighted in the following excerpt:

> *We are normally provided with a format of what examinations should look like. For instance, for undergraduates, in many courses, it is necessary that the continuous assessment carries 40 marks and the university examination carries 60 marks. It is compulsory that some parts in section A have the multiple-choice items, true-false items, and matching items which in most cases require remembering. It is unfortunate that many teacher educators are even not familiar with constructing items that are multiple choices in nature but still measure high orders of thinking.* ***Luis***

In support of Luis' observation, Smith reported that the rigidity of examination formats leads to the cultivation of graduates who cannot undertake tasks that require higher order thinking such

as applying, analysing, evaluating, and creating. Smith reported to be uncomfortable with that practice, and thus, he has been examining students using cases that were reported to be reflected in multiple choice items as well.

Discussion and Conclusion

By exploring teacher educators' perceptions of the concept 'critical pedagogy', and the challenges affecting the use of critical pedagogy in teaching, our study findings indicate that teacher educators perceived critical pedagogy as a concept related to the implementation of three important dimensions: a friendly relationship with students, reflective teaching and dialogic teaching. The dimension of developing a friendly relationship with students helps teacher educators to pose critical questions that demand students to participate and provide reflective responses. This teacher educator-student relationship also helps students to have a feeling that they are not being challenged by the critical questions posed to them. It further enables students to critique the knowledge shared in the classroom (Kinyota & Kavenuke, 2018). Furthermore, dialogic teaching, which relies on development of a friendly relationship with students, is a prerequisite for the success use of critical pedagogy. Employing dialogic teaching helps students feel free to reflect their own thoughts and ideas on the topics under discussion. This supports the use of the learner-centered approach that cares for students' understanding and participation (Freire, 2010; Hooks, 2010). Meanwhile, the dimension of reflective teaching is associated with using reflective examples that connect classroom lessons with students' life experiences. Put differently, reflective examples help students to connect content and problems to real life situations (Kirstein & Kunz, 2015; Swartz & Mcguinness, 2014). It also helps students to be able to improvise urgent solutions for unexpected teaching dilemmas or even deal with challenges beyond the teaching contexts. From the findings, we argue that if critical pedagogy is used in Tanzanian classrooms and international contexts wherein lecturing is still dominant, among others, teacher educator-student relationship will be improved. Moreover, if teacher educators practise what they perceive to be critical pedagogy, that is, the use of reflective and dialogic teaching, then (Tanzanian) classrooms will be transformed to places of liberation.

Our study findings also show that teacher educators face many challenges while attempting to employ critical pedagogy in teaching. The main challenges relate to the presence of crowded classes, the dominance of the lecturing style and the use of English as a language of instruction, the lack of teaching resources, and the unsuitable nature of assessment techniques prescribed by university authorities. Regarding class sizes, the presence of too many students in one class is a challenge to the use of critical pedagogy. Large classes hinder the implementation of critical pedagogy in many teaching settings (e.g., Brookfield, 2012; Dong, 2015; Mamdani, 2009; Maringe & Sing, 2014; Muthanna & Karaman, 2014; Muthanna, 2016). Despite these challenges, universities still continue to annually recruit many students as a source of income (Clark, 2018) without considering the need for providing more teaching spaces for students as a responsive solution (Dong, 2015; Kavenuke, 2018; Mamdani, 2009) or even recruiting more teacher educators who could share the teaching loads (Mamdani, 2009). From these findings, we are of the view that universities have to rethink of modifying the students' recruitment policy.

Furthermore, lecturing is the dominant teaching style in higher teacher education programmes in several contexts, and students believe that their role is to listen to their instructors. Since students are not familiar with the critical pedagogy approach, teacher educators find it challenging to engage students in discussions. This has led to passivity among students, hence developing a culture of silence (Clark, 2018). As a solution, Pacho (2013) calls for a form of education that prepares learners to challenge blind adherence to customs and traditions. This type of education makes students respectful but fearless to question ideas from the authority. Furthermore, our findings show that the language of instruction (English) silences students and hinders them from participating effectively in discussions. This is because students have no mastery of the English language, making it hard for them to comprehend the content or share their thoughts. This prompts teacher educators to code-mix and code-switch between English and Swahili, a Tanzanian national language, in order to enhance students' participation in

discussions. Such a code-mix and/or code-switch could also be practical in other international contexts wherein the medium of instruction is English that is different from the national language.

Additionally, the challenge of inadequate teaching resources is even more critical. This teaching resource inadequacy relates to the presence of traditional buildings with rooms that contain fixed seats and tables, and elevated stages for teacher educators to stand on when delivering the content to students. Further, the time limitation hinders an effective use of critical pedagogy. This time limitation forces instructors to rush in order to cover the content, which is usually overloaded (e.g., Paulo, 2014a; Paulo, 2014b; Paulo & Tilya, 2014). Together, the challenges affect the use of critical pedagogy in classrooms, hence, making teaching and learning more teacher centred.

To conclude, teacher educators worldwide, who are interested in the use of 'critical pedagogies', can employ the critical pedagogy approach discussed in our findings to develop their students' critical thinking and reflection skills. The application of the approach also helps students be critical outside the classroom, which is the ultimate goal of education. This however requires the continuous professional development of teacher educators toward the use of critical pedagogies. This continuous professional development of teacher educators might encourage administrators of higher teacher education institutions in several international contexts to gradually stipulate the obligatory use of the critical pedagogy in teaching. However, the presence of all necessary teaching resources (e.g., more teacher educators, interactive whiteboards, projectors, access to internet and international databases) along with creating classroom spaces that accommodate only a small number of students is necessary for a successful implementation of the critical pedagogy approach. This also means that there is a need for either enrolling a sizable number of students in every programme or recruiting more teacher educators to reduce the teacher educator-student ratio. In implementing either of these alternatives, it is imperative for ministries responsible for higher teacher education to provide financial assistances to higher teacher education institutions. In addition to considering these insights, it is also important that the assessment modalities are improved so as to match well with the teaching approaches that align with the critical pedagogy approach.

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