Original Article

IEEPJ Vol. 5, No. 3, 2023, 79-93

http://ieepj.hormozgan.ac.ir/

Iranian Evolutionary and Educational Psychology Journal

IEEPJ

Analyzing the Discourse of Learning in Critical Pedagogy with an Emphasis on Michael Apple's Perspective

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Abstract: The current study aims to scrutinize the discourse learning within the context of critical pedagogy, with a specific focus on Michael Apple's perspective. Critical pedagogy represents a relatively recent theory within the realm of school education and the learning system. It sheds light on issues of inequality, silence, exclusion, and unveils new dimensions for comprehending the intricate layers of relationships within educational institutions. This research employs a qualitative approach, utilizing Fairclough's critical discourse analysis methodology. The primary data collection method involves an extensive review of relevant literature and documents. The research primarily draws upon Michael Apple's written works, which were purposively selected for their relevance to the subject matter. The research findings indicate that the discourse generator in the learning process aspires to foster dialogue-based communication, critical learning, forward-looking, and democratic educational practices aimed at transforming individuals. Simultaneously, it aims to foster a sense of community that opposes the interests of those in positions of power and capitalism. This is achieved through the dissemination of knowledge within society and educational institutions, employing market-oriented learning, promoting intelligence-based learning, and advancing equitable educational practices, ultimately fostering the emergence of critical learners within the educational context.

Keywords: Critical pedagogy, critical discourse analysis, learning, Michael Apple perspective

Introduction

Pedagogy is a commonly used term in educational literature (Murphy, 2015). This knowledge pertains to the theory of learning, encompassing aspects related to the essence of education, upbringing, and the learner. It represents a thoughtful and practical fusion of ideas. Pedagogy has developed over time, drawing from the evolution of knowledge and changing societal perspectives. It has embraced a more apparent developmental approach, incorporating Socratic inquiry techniques dating back to the 17th century ((Gauthier & Tardif, 1999). At present, the widely recognized concept of critical theory has its roots in this historical legacy. It is considered a relatively recent theory within the school education system, with its fundamental principles and intellectual foundations originating in the Frankfurt School of thought. This school includes thinkers such as Adorno, Horkheimer, and Marcuse, who view the structure of education in contemporary societies as intricately linked to political and historical contexts (Armitage, 2011). They challenge the assumptions of impartiality and the commercialization of teaching and learning, asserting that this commodification represents an ideological project driven by political

Article information: Received: 2023/01/16 | Accepted: 2023/08/19 |Published: 2023/09/1. https://doi.org/10.52547/ieepj.5.3.79

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[DOR: 20.1001.1.25884395.2023.5.3.7.8]

[DOI: 10.22034/5.3.79]

motives and profit-seeking intentions (Todd et al., 2017). It serves to consolidate power and legitimize authority among learners (Apple, 2001). In such an environment, criticism and civic engagement by learners lose their significance, and conservative goals lead to the prevalence of unequal relationships (Mohammadi & Zibakalam, 2019). Nevertheless, critical pedagogy introduces fresh definitions and new perspectives to comprehend the deeper, concealed layers of relationships within educational institutions at various levels. Its commitment lies in initiating social transformation for the entire community (Kridel, 2010). This is because one of the most crucial roles a critical educator can play is to create opportunities for the voices of the silenced and marginalized to be heard. Educators themselves are learners who employ their insights to enhance collective learning (Kincheloe, 2008). From this vantage point, critical learning confronts the forces of capitalist globalization in education and learning. This emancipatory, transformative learning is based on the belief that learners can decode their societal positions and power dynamics by reinterpreting the world (Giroux, 2004). This enhances learners' awareness of social equality and equity, motivating them to uncover contradictions in their surroundings to create a remarkably more just and equitable world (Meerow et al., 2019).

In recent decades, scholars and researchers in education have shifted their focus towards practical beliefs regarding human capacity for learning (Miller, 2002), the learners' ability to comprehend their circumstances and environmental conditions and the concentration on learners while enriching their social functions (Brockbank & McGill, 2012; Fry et al., 2008). These developments have provided a more suitable foundation for exploring transformative or critical learning (Ross, 2016) and creating a just society. The results of such endeavors can be observed in the works of researchers like Biesta and Osberg (2007) and Doll Jr (2012). Given the global rise in the concept of critical pedagogy and the ideas of radical, border, and critical education theorists (Giroux, 2004), as well as research on discourse-based and critical-based learning methods (Bransford et al., 1986; Cooke & Moyle, 2002; Druva & Anderson, 1983), it is essential to further highlight how the discourse of learning in critical pedagogy, based on the thoughts of Michael Apple, one of the most renowned contemporary critical pedagogues, can be made more prominent. To date, there has been limited research in Persian or English on the analysis of critical discourse or discourse-based learning in critical pedagogy in the field of education. The most relevant studies conducted primarily focus on critical teaching and curriculum content, including those by Webster-Wright (2009), Brown (2011), and Qaidi et al. (2018). Considering critical learning as a cognitive and collaborative process, it becomes evident that these studies reflect the potential for exploring discourse of learning within critical pedagogy, with an emphasis on Apple's perspectives. Given that Fairclough's discourse analysis is one of the powerful methods for analyzing texts and examining their external influences and the most comprehensive framework for critical discourse

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analysis, in which language serves as a critical discourse, social control, and social interaction within the text (AlAfnan, 2017), this research, after reviewing the main discourses related to learning, seeks to answer the following questions using this method: What are the components of the critical pedagogy discourse of Apple regarding learning? From what structures, situational contexts, and textual and intertextual relationships is Apple's critical pedagogy discourse on learning constructed? What are the reciprocal effects of Apple's critical pedagogy discourse on learning with social and institutional structures?

Material and Methods

The present research employs a qualitative approach using Fairclough's critical discourse analysis method (Fairclough, 2013). Critical discourse analysis is a qualitative research method that reveals implicit statements or, in other words, tacit propositions. Its purpose is to explore the relationship between language, power, and ideology, ultimately providing a better understanding of social issues by delving into the content of texts. This analysis focuses on aspects such as discrimination and inequality as emphasized elements.

Norman Fairclough proposes a three-stage method in critical discourse analysis, which includes description, interpretation, and explanation (Fairclough, 2013). In this analysis, attention is drawn to three main aspects:

1. The textual aspect (text): Describing the impact of ideology on the text's appearance by revealing the text's discursive choices (vocabulary selection and textual structure).

2. The practice of discourse: This phase encompasses two levels of interpretation—interpretation of situational context and interpretation of intertextual context. Situational context interpretation reveals who produced the text and who consumes it. The aim of intertextual interpretation is to identify which other texts influence the text.

3. The broader social and cultural context: In the third stage, analysis is directed towards the social and cultural contexts governing the text. It aims to uncover dominant narratives within the text and the political, social, and cultural backgrounds of the text. This way, the concept of analysis and its levels in Fairclough's critical discourse analysis become clear.

Since critical discourse analysis is interpretive in nature, it does not involve statistical population or rely on quantitative methods. Instead, it examines the textual relationships and discursive formations. Additionally, validity and reliability of the research are not assessed based on data collected during the discourse analysis. Rather, the focus is on the argumentative power and expressiveness of the author.

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In this regard, the research population comprises all the works, texts (written language), of Michael Apple in critical pedagogy. Purposeful sampling has been employed, given that not all stages of the method need to be used, and the choice and use of tools depend on the research and its scope. After explaining the relationships and discursive framework of Apple's discourse on learning in critical pedagogy, this study conducts an exploration within those three stages, aiming to uncover the connections between language, ideology, and power.

Results

Description: Text and linguistic features analysis

In this stage, the text is examined in terms of vocabulary, grammar, text coherence, textual structures, and ideological differences of representation and evaluation (Fairclough, 2000).

Vocabulary Analysis in Apple's Discourse: In the exploration of Apple's discourse in critical pedagogy, the presence and meaningful repetition of words such as domination, commodification, inequality, oppression, commercialization, authoritarianism, homogenization, compliance, conservatism, consumerism, vulnerability, acquiescence, unilateralism, awareness, democratization, deconstruction, activism, and futurism are identified. All of these words revolve around the axis of critical freedom of thought, speech, and thinking.

Additionally, the authored texts by Apple emphasize the main goals of learning in critical pedagogy, which include self-reflection learning, progressive learning, authentic learning, critical literacy learning, empowering learning, and hope-based learning for learners. It also highlights the emphasis on re-creation and the avoidance of reproduction and profit-seeking in critical learning.

Metaphors

According to Fairclough's method, a metaphor is a means of representing one aspect of experience in terms of another aspect. Some of the metaphors in Apple's discourse on critical pedagogy and the aspects of positive and negative representations they entail include: critical literacy learning, profit-oriented learning, reproduction learning, empowerment, hopeful learning, retrogressive learning, democratic citizenship, and controlling/compliant/reactive learning (Fairclough, 2000).

Relational Values in Grammar

In this stage, the focus is on explaining how the choice of words in the text depends on the social relationships between participants and the use of sentences (declarative, interrogative, and imperative). Declarative sentences have a subject and a verb, and their characteristics include the position of the subject (the writer or speaker), the information-giving position, and the recipient's position (the information receiver). In the discourse of Apple's learning, most of the sentences used are declarative,

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which indicates that the text generator places special emphasis on presenting the desired content and conveying its message to the general audience. Imperative sentences have been used to a limited extent, indicating that the text generator aims to create a connection with the audience and ultimately increase the impact of the text. Interrogative sentences also indicate that the text generator seeks to transfer experiences and information to the audience, intending to engage, reflect, and create intellectual challenges. In critical discourse analysis, the value of words is derived from important and authoritative concepts, as represented by the speaker or writer.

Inclusive and Exclusive Pronoun "We"

A pronoun that encompasses both the writer and the reader simultaneously is called an inclusive pronoun, while a pronoun that refers only to the writer, an individual, or a group accompanying them is termed an exclusive pronoun. The pronoun "we" in Apple's discourse has been used 23 times, with 12 of them being considered exclusive pronouns and the rest inclusive pronouns. The text generator's purpose in using the exclusive "we" pronoun is to address learners who have played a role in the process of achieving human liberation and awareness through democratic learning and critical learning, and who have gained abundant experiences along this path. However, in most sentences where the "we" pronoun is used inclusively, the text generator's intent is to refer to the nation and society of America and the critical learners as creators and decision-makers, indicating the author's emphasis on expanding and consolidating true unity, coherence, and consensus in criticism, resistance to domination, and educational opposition among all different strata of learners, including those interested in authentic learning, constructing, and reconstructing in learning (Fairclough, 2000).

Expressive Values

Each proposition is either absolute or implicational, recognized through verb tenses and auxiliary verbs. The majority of verbs used in Apple's discourse on critical pedagogy reflect the text generator's absolute commitment to the truth of the propositions in the texts and the author's transparency of perspective towards the world. Therefore, modal auxiliary verbs such as "may," "might," "possibility," and vocabulary items like "perhaps" and "probably" have been used very sparingly in the text (Fairclough, 2000).

Textual Coherence

Any formal feature of text that indicates a connection between one sentence and another is called a feature of textual coherence. The prominent use of conjunctions in Apple's discourse mainly concerns distancing objectives and displaying differences, as previously mentioned in the analysis of contradictory vocabulary. Additionally, these distancing elements serve to explain concepts in two

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contrasting styles: A is but not B, or A isnt, but B is. These distinctions all indicate the text generator's effort to clarify (Fairclough, 2000).

Table 1. Conjunctions, types, functions, and frequencies in the discourse of learning text structures

Conjunction	Type	Function	Frequency
But	Simple	Basic sentence	54
However	Simple	Basic sentence	42
Also	Simple	Basic sentence	28
If	Simple	Conditional sentence	46
So/that	Simple	Conclusion	33
Because/since	Simple	Provide a reason	21

In Apple's discourse on critical pedagogy, textual structures in authored texts are generally divided into three main categories: 1. Critical literacy, 2. Critical learning, and 3. Democratic learning for a non-elitist world. In Apple's works, the initial section introduces the topics of consciousness-raising and critical understanding as a way to enter the main discussions. In the middle section, it discusses the trajectory of domination, unilateralism, commercialization, and consumerism in education, as well as the compliance and ideological alignment of learners in topics such as self-reflection, critical thinking, deconstruction, differentiation, and emancipatory search of students. It also addresses the necessity of revisiting valuable experiences such as identity formation, agency, transformation, criticality, and creativity in the world. Finally, in the last section of the texts, the author reflects on critical understanding and the practical realization of critical thinking acquired in learning and provides clues regarding the unfinished nature of learners' criticality and the transmitter mentality in learning (Fairclough, 2000). Thus, Apple's discourse on learning exhibits a clear logical structure in its textual organization, and the author systematically and purposefully presents the content.

Interpretation: Discourse practice

Interpretations are a combination of the text's content and the interpreter's mindset, and they originate from situational factors (Fairclough, 1992).

The Nature of the Situation (Situational Context and Discourse Type)

A situation is recognized as a distinct set of activities that are framed within a specific institution (Fairclough, 2000). To investigate the nature of the situation, attention must be given to the elements of activity, title, and objective in the chosen issue. The activity in this situation is the general authorship, publication, and distribution of Apple's written books. The titles of the activities undertaken are: 1. Education and Power, 2. Formal Knowledge (Democratic Education in the Age of Conservatism), 3. Ideology and Curriculum, and 4. Can Education Change Society? The objective of this situation involves

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learners achieving critical awareness, self-actualization, and empowerment through active, action-oriented, and conscious learning. The aim is to offer guidance for realizing genuine, free, and selective existence in individuals' learning, completing emancipation and the emancipatory search for students (Fairclough, 2000).

Parties Involved in the Situation

This aspect involves examining the individuals involved and the types of relationships between them, as well as determining their positions as agents. In one aspect of the activity, the authorship of books and written materials by Apple, who is considered the most prominent contemporary critical pedagogy scholar, plays a role. In the other aspect, it encompasses a general audience, teachers, and education practitioners involved in teaching and education.

Interpersonal Relations in the Situation (Participants)

This refers to power relations and social interactions between the parties involved in the discourse (Fairclough, 2000). In Apple's authored books and texts, which are considered prominent and fundamental texts of the critical pedagogy approach, it is evident that he adopts an interactive, cross-disciplinary, and harmonious approach with learners. This approach aligns with learners who seek freedom, critical consciousness, and self-reflection. It aims to create a critical discourse space and self-reflection among the audience and promote the goals of critical pedagogy in developing awareness and emancipation.

Language in Advancing the Discourse

Language serves as a tool to achieve institutional objectives, and it not only defines the genre but also determines the communication channel (Fairclough, 2000). Apple's written works use written language. In these texts, the text generator utilizes literary and research literature and the language's capacity to convey and explain the concepts of his works. This necessitates an explanatory, reflective, inquisitive, and recommendation-oriented tone on one hand, and considering a broad and diverse audience in the pursuit of freedom in learning on the other.

Implicit Textual Structure and Presuppositions

The examination of the implicit textual structure focuses on common backgrounds and shared presuppositions among participants (Fairclough, 2000). In Apple's authored works, one must search for clues that connect the target text to other texts that have content-related associations or support it. Presuppositions are not features or characteristics of the text; rather, they are aspects of interpretation by the text's producers of the implicit context shared by the text generator and participants in critical pedagogy. Apple mentions 35 assumptions in the explanation of learning achievements in critical pedagogy, all of which have presuppositions such as consciousness-raising, critical understanding,

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domination, repetition, inequality, empowerment, principled, transformative, ideological, populist, debate, discourse, concreteness, action, liberation, emancipation, conservatism, independence, market-oriented, uniformity, anti-freedom, deposit, isolationism, learning accumulation, elite, authority, reductionism, preservation, introversion, and accumulation in learning.

Negation Strategy

Elements of the implicit textual structure that text producers can use to challenge and debate presuppositions (Fairclough, 2000). In Apple's authored texts, he negates presuppositions between the generator and participants more in four places: 1. In learning, we cannot merely change structural conditions by thinking; we must resolve them so that we can interpret them in practice, and mere thinking will never suffice for this task (Apple, 2001). 2. We should never adopt methods that, in their use, rely on racial dynamics, histories, and assumptions about people of color, hidden or overt, in current efforts to turn schools into tools of business (Apple, 2013).

Table 2. Negated presuppositions (Interrogative Phrases)

No	Negated presuppositions (Interrogative Phrases)
1	We cannot fully understand the power of text, what it does in terms of ideological beliefs, unless we take seriously the ways in which students use it not only as individuals, but as members of social groups. to take (Apple, 2013).
2	We cannot assume that what is in the text is really taught. And we also cannot assume that what is taught is really learned by the learners (Apel, 2013).
3	Beliefs and opinions should not be seen only as active productions and as a set of beings, but they are also rejection processes, because they have the potential to destroy their productive system (Appel, 2013).
4	We cannot assume that because most of the education is linked to the processes of gender and class stratification, all learning only shows dominance relations or includes dominant groups (Apple, 2013).
5	Strong arguments cannot be created unless they are subject to the thoughtful analysis of others about the strengths and weaknesses of our claims, which requires the presentation of self-reflective analyzes (Apel, 2013).

In all exemplary cases, it is important for the text's audience to understand that the four mentioned perspectives, including the separation of knowing from doing, mindset, and concreteness in learning, are considered prevalent interpretations in human society.

Elaboration: Social practice

It delves into the social foundation, the changes in field knowledge, and its reproduction during discourse practices. The discourse itself is both influenced by institutional structures and has an impact on these structures (Fairclough, 2000).

The Impact of Apple's Discourse on Institutional Structures

According to Apple, one doesn't need to be familiar with Foucault's works to understand that it is politics on a micro level and identity construction that is at play in society. Instead, it's more about moving away from reductionist motives and a focus on essence and fundamentals in critical pedagogy studies. In fact, similar to Paulo Freire and following his lead, we should be thoroughly critical of a situation that is

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against books and theories. We should prefer knowledge that is created and produced in the tension between theory and practice, just as Freire did. Therefore, following Freire's footsteps means keeping the reality that shouldn't be turned into a slogan alive; the main motto is: "Don't lose hope, teach, and organize." What we continually do is use Paulo Freire as an easy model, not just as a transferable technique, and it needs to be adapted and reconstructed with various individuals. Also, what Gramsci calls social criticism should be a primary activity, which is based on literacy activities rooted in such criticisms. Apple points out that our perceptions of the world, our place in it, and our position in it include elements of both the concept of bad and the concept of good. With individuals like Bourdieu, Gentz, Althusser, and others who are important agents in the reproduction of society through schools, I agree. By following a wide spectrum of educators, from Dewey to Hobsbawm, I envision a pattern based on the environment and reality. It should be noted that my non-grammatical approach intersects with some poststructuralist theories. Although Antonio Gramsci's theory of the concept of bad and the concept of good is the foundation of my books, it converges with Althusser's structuralism. Even though schools sometimes become hostages to accumulations and legitimacies that they themselves have not necessarily created, they also provide a fundamental basis for thinking about their own functioning. Thus, Althusserian structuralism and the Gramscian approach have attracted me in this path (Apple, 2013).

The Influence of Apple's Discourse on Institutional Structures

People like Apple are among a limited group worldwide who dedicate themselves to creating fresh insights about educational possibilities. They also aim to create new patterns for learners who transform them into teachers not only in their own countries but also around the world, and he has achieved this. Within the theoretical framework of Michael Apple, continuous analyses of public and private institutions, as well as the lifeworlds of learners, are concealed. Hence, the impact of Apple has undoubtedly been due to his ongoing work, and it has generally been in vibrant and expansive communities. One of the significant reasons for my (Apple) writings is an attempt to confront the most challenging questions regarding personal responsibility in our compulsory era (or individualism) and the ethics of conservatism in educational systems. Because one of the tasks of active and critical individuals in educational institutions is to continuously and openly teach multiple critical traditions and to look at society from the perspective of multiple groups. On the other hand, the effort for democracy in education and learning is not only there and outside it. We must deeply concern ourselves with what is happening in schools at all levels. Part of our duty is to ask what is wrong and establish communication with pioneering educators, those who have tried to teach society how to individually or collectively challenge and change these relationships. I, as a critical thinker in education and in global crises of social

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justice, am present. Although the book "Education and Power" presents a view of life and institutions, I (Apple) put it forward. But everyone's work is fundamental for what we call the journey of hope. Neglect in this area or not being involved in this work means ignoring the lives of millions of learners and educators worldwide (Apple, 2013).

Discussion

Examining the Discourse of Critical Pedagogy, with a specific emphasis on Apple's perspectives during the descriptive phase, reveals that although his authored texts maintain a formal tone, the text generator employs vocabulary and language structure to foster a sense of camaraderie, trust, and unity in the reader. When addressing critiques of market-driven learning and tendencies towards self-assessment in learners, it steers clear of adopting a negative tone and instead explicitly highlights weaknesses using specific terminology.

Regarding relational values, sentences frequently commence with "should," emphasizing critical learning and self-assurance through verbs like "can." Conversely, when the verb "cannot" is employed, it typically conveys a sense of insufficiency.

The pronoun "we" serves a dual purpose, signifying alignment between the author and learners in their pursuit of strategic ideas. On the occasions when "you" is used, Apple addresses young learners and the silent generation while assuming a position of reticence.

When analyzing the text's coherence and lexical contradictions, the frequent use of the conjunction "but" primarily seeks to establish distance and convey:

1. Ideological and functional disparities with the instigators and stakeholders responsible for the current intellectual and attitudinal state of learners.
2. Enlightenment and criticism of these disparities.
3. A distinction between the current state and the desired one, instilling hope.

During the interpretative phase, Apple adopts an interactive and revolutionary approach. By employing elements such as text structure, vocabulary usage, interconnected sentences, and maintaining a friendly yet serious and formal tone, he effectively leverages language's potential to convey and elucidate concepts within his authored texts.

In summary, the text's structure can be divided into four key sections:

1. Distinctive characteristics of critical learning.
2. Dialogue.
3. Awareness.
4. Alertness.

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The text discourse maintains logical progression, with the author aiming to rejuvenate the spirit and authentic ideals of humanity, emphasizing emancipation and liberation for the new generation of learners. Initially, he paints a challenging portrait of an era marked by oppression and estrangement. Subsequently, by creating an optimistic discourse environment, he systematically and intentionally advances the textual content to challenge preconceptions.

During the clarification phase, the article delves into the impact of texts and authored works on institutional structures. It references and interprets the perspectives of critical thinkers and mentors influenced by Apple. Furthermore, it centers on the influence of the discourse of critical pedagogy on the textual structures of the teaching-learning institution. Topics such as the influence on young learners, society, and the demands of different segments within the educational institution are explored by the authors.

The results of this research demonstrate that in the discourse of Apple's pedagogy, critical learning necessitates critical engagement with the text and context (word and world) and a critical perspective, findings that align with those of Fazalizadeh and Bagherzadeh (2020), Radji (2013), and Sohbatlo and Mirzamohammadi (2015). Furthermore, in the process of Apple's pedagogical approach, by fostering critical awareness, avoiding the imposition of banking education and the culture of silence, and introducing problem-based learning, a wide range of activities, informational resources, and interaction opportunities are made available to learners, findings that are in line with Sharifi Darzadeh et al. (2019), Keramati (2023).

Additionally, in Apple's critical pedagogy discourse, within the critical dialogical method, which is perceived as the most important tool for raising awareness and fostering conscientization, the significance of speech and dialogue is underscored. Schools are viewed as instruments for the development of new forms of knowledge and learning. These findings also resonate with Radji (2013), Sohbatlo and Mirzamohammadi (2015).

On the researcher's part, there were several limitations encountered during this research, including:

1. Scarce research in the field of critical pedagogy and learning in Iran.
2. Rare application of the critical discourse analysis research method within the realm of critical pedagogy.
3. Ambiguity and interpretability issues regarding the use of certain terms and concepts within the critical theory domain.
4. A lack of authentic resources concerning learning in critical pedagogy and deficiencies in both the source and content cycle.

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In conclusion, in line with the research findings suggesting the utilization of active and empowering pedagogical discourse, and the transformation from a passive and conformist learning discourse to an active and critical one, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. Given the pivotal role of critical awareness in critical learning, it is imperative for the educational system to move away from coercive teacher-student relationships that reinforce inherited values and lower the social concept of learning. Instead, the system should embrace democratic learning and provide opportunities for the exchange of progressive ideas, ultimately leading to critical awareness and improvement.
2. Schools must shift towards adaptable and anticipatory learning by steering clear of the culture of silence that results from viewing obedient learners as mere receptacles of lifeless narrative content. Instead, they should promote true learner identity and engagement in text interpretation, leading to the construction of their own critical perspectives and worldviews.
3. If critical learning is to be realized in educational systems, we can anticipate the emergence of open-minded thinking, a hopeful global perspective, and human-centric creativity. This transformation will also bring forth new and active interpretations in society, as well as resolutions to the contradictions inherent in the learning process.
4. In addition to the steps taken to liberate learning from the current unequal power dynamics and authoritarianism in education, it is essential to implement a new classroom approach based on dialogical relationships. This approach will shift from the vertical and one-sided teacher-learner relationship to a horizontal, mutual respect, and critically informed connection.

Conflict of interest: The authors acknowledge that there is no conflict of interest in this article.

Financial support: The authors confirm that they have not received any financial support for this research.

Acknowledgments: The researchers find it necessary to express their utmost appreciation and gratitude to all those who assisted them in conducting this study.

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