

CHAPTER 11: THE FACES OF JANUS IN WOMEN STUDIES: CRITICAL FEMINIST THEORY AND ELT

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*“Feminism, like antiracism,
is thus not simply one more social issue in ESL
but a way of thinking, a way of teaching, and,
most importantly, a way of learning”.*

(Schenke, 1996, p. 158)

1. Introduction

The multicultural, technological, and educational transformations of the twenty-first century have culminated in several social, educational, and political movements. In this vein, learners and educators must cultivate the ability to notice cultural disparities as compared to their own, while also fostering a mindset that is cognizant of active gender relations and courteous of one another so as to nurture a harmonious educational environment that is conducive to comfort challenges. Holman et al. (2018) state that “despite recent progress, the gender gap appears likely to persist for generations” besides highlighting “the gender gap will not close without further reforms in education, mentoring, and academic publishing” (p.1). From this vantage point and within this framework of thought, Critical Feminist Theory (CFT) occupies a prominent presence in education in general and English Language Teaching (ELT) and ELT in Türkiye particular. We were inspired to dig into CFT and ELT by the dearth of research on Critical Feminism in ELT, alongside the plethora of research on gender studies, feminist theories, and English language teaching (Hooks, 2000; Katsiampoura, 2024, Starcevic & Aboujaoude, 2015). In this paper, Critical Feminist Theory will be covered, including a brief background, fundamental concepts, including a discussion of their relevance in ELT and ELT in Türkiye.

2. Critical Feminist Theory

The core concept of our paper is a Critical Feminist Theory (CFT), which incorporates Feminist Theory and Critical Theory. Wood (2015) advocates that Feminist Theories, which are not always critical, and Critical Theories, which are not always feminist, are the two main theoretical subgroups from which Critical Feminist Theories originate. We will present an overview of Feminist and Critical Theories as an initial basis for addressing the primary topics of Critical Feminist Theories and the assumptions that underpin them.

3. Feminist Waves

Preconceived notions on the definition of feminism may impede its integration into educational practices or research endeavors. Realizing that feminism aims to alleviate oppression for all individuals, we believe that disseminating its definition might mitigate the problem at hand. Feminism is identified as “the belief that men and women are equal and should have equal rights and opportunities in all spheres of life—personal, social, work, and public” (Wood, 2015, p.290). As a response to the shallow interpretation of Feminism as merely misogyny, Hooks (2000) emphasizes that “Simply put, feminism is a movement to end sexism, sexist exploitation and oppression. I liked this definition because it does not imply that men were the enemy” (p. viii). Besides, Hooks (2000) noted that:

A male who has divested of male privilege, who has embraced feminist politics, is a worthy comrade in struggle, in no way a threat to feminism, whereas a female who remains wedded to sexist thinking and behavior infiltrating feminist movement is a dangerous threat. (p.12)

The utilization of a feminist perspective serves the objective of facilitating the exploration of the ways in which individuals interact within systems and, perhaps, providing potential solutions to confront and eliminate oppressive systems and institutions. The lived experience of any person or persons, not only women, is taken into consideration by Feminist Theory, with a focus on oppression within the framework. Arinder (2020) claims that Feminism does not endorse distinctions or similarities between men, nor does it advocate for excluding the males or exclusively advancing the welfare of women. Rather, it stands for financial, political, and social parity between men and women. Arinder (ibid) on Feminist Theory proposes a model which implies that repressive structures can be shattered by awareness and intervention with the intent to facilitate transformation and enlightenment.

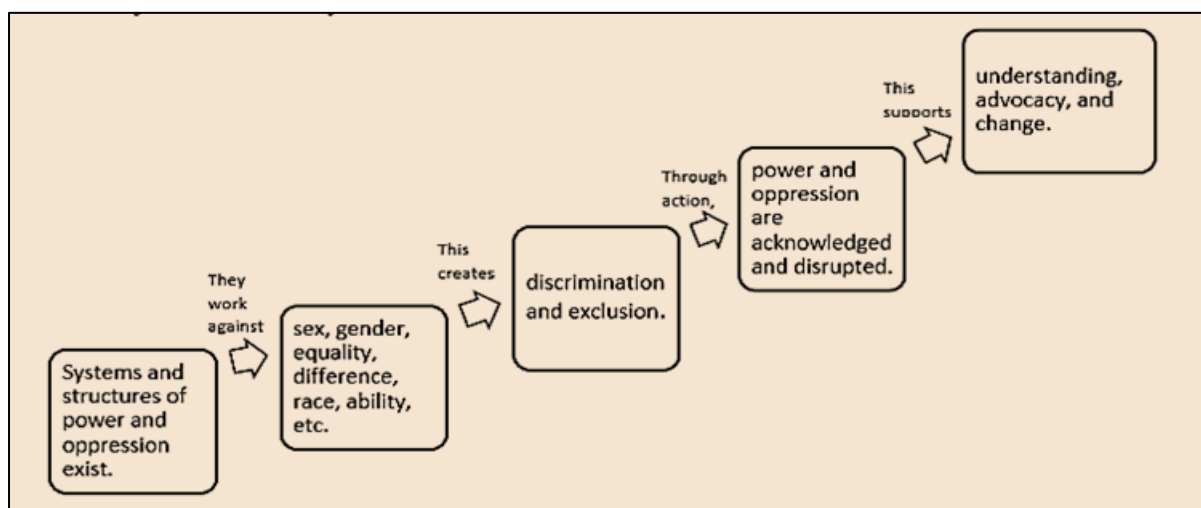


Figure 1. Model of feminist theory (Arinder, 2020)

Having stated the definition and the core rationale behind Feminism, delving into Feminist Theories will lead readers to comprehend the past and future directions and developments in it. Feminist Theories have many waves from a retrospective to prospective lenses, but not limited to, Liberal Feminism, Radical Feminism, Social Feminism, Ecofeminism and Cyberfeminism.

The imbalance of rights between men and women is central to **Liberal Feminism**. Liberal feminism places special emphasis on empowering girls and women to become more self-sufficient and freer to pick their own roles and lives rather than being coerced into adhering to stereotypes. Contemporary Liberal Feminism contends that women need to participate more actively in politics and enjoy equivalent access to employment and educational opportunities like any men. Under the umbrella of Liberal Feminist Theory, women are subjugated in a multitude of ways, including sexual assault, domestic violence, human rights breaches against women, and the gap in wealth between men and women. As a conflict resolution, equal odds for men and women, abolition of legal barriers averting women from experiencing the same rights as men, and the repeal of disparate access to power between men and women may be the means of ensuring justice between men and women (Katsiampoura, 2024). Liberal feminists should consider the mission to advocate autonomy in the face of antagonism by particular societies, including what boundaries should be established for the initiative, since liberalism faces opposition for its propensity for prioritizing equality over diversity (Enslin, 2001, 2003; Okin, 1998).

Liberal Feminism in the 1960s and 1970s underwent a dramatic and profound development that was later referred to as **Radical Feminism** (Graham, 1994). Its foundations are twofold; first, women are of inestimable worth; and second, because of the patriarchal system, they are viciously repressed everywhere (Rowland & Klein, 2013). It is their conviction that the capacity of women is hampered by the gender dichotomy, which centers on male/female. It is distinguished by its disdain of the premise that there is a solitary, global notion that defines womanhood, its condemnation of the conventional family structure, and its particular focus on the struggles of women of color and other underrepresented communities. It criticizes marriage and family since they both serve the patriarchy that sustains gender inequality alive in society (Atkinson, 2000; Katsiampoura, 2024; Mohajan, 2022). Radical feminism has pitfalls as well; in addition to being highly extremist in advocating never getting married at all, radical feminism is conspicuously mute on the matter of racism (Rudy, 2001).

Inspired by Marxism, **Social Feminism** emerged as a response to Liberal Feminism. Both the capitalist and patriarchal systems, according to socialist feminists, exploit women. They dispute with the radical feminism theory that maintains that gender inequality is only caused by the system of patriarchy (Hansen & Philipson, 1990). The movement should strive to address these issues holistically so as attain women's liberation, as it analyzes how gender and class intersect resulting in novel kinds of oppression and privileges. In the words of social feminists, class deviations among women have a bearing on their gender-related experience (Mohajan, 2022).

Quite recently, **Ecofeminism** has been a current concept as a confluence of Environmentalism and Feminism. Nevertheless, the phrases women and ecology are not equivalent. Being an Ecofeminist does not suggest that women are inherently more connected to nature and life than males. Some men dedicate their lives to safeguarding the environment and/or animals, whereas some women show apathy or hostility towards these burgeoning forms of cognizance. Throughout history, women have been deprived of access to weapons and typically been entrusted with the care of the most vulnerable members of society, including children, the old, and the sick. They have also been remembered for their heightened sensitivity to the needs of others and their outpouring of affection. When these attributes merge with pertinent knowledge and a critical analysis of hegemonic discourses, the circumstances arise to pique their interest in safeguarding the environment and other living beings where Ecofeminism emerges. The impact of gender in preventing ecological degradation and plunder is the main thrust of Ecofeminism (Gaard, 2015; Puleo, 2017).

Finally, the notion of **Cyberfeminism** has arisen in tandem with the rise of digital technology, and it has gradually gained more and more significance in the modern era. Starcevic and Aboujaoude (2015) introduced the term Cyberfeminism which denotes the confluence of feminism and digital technology. The term accentuates the potential of women to leverage digital technology to uproot patriarchy and achieve gender equality. According to Brimacombe et al. (2018), young women experience greater ease in expressing themselves in cyberspace amid intersectional prejudice on the basis of age and sexual orientation, as opposed to in physical spaces where they might be prone to cultural and legislative limitations. Thus, Feminist theory can shed light on and guide our ever-changing digital landscape orientation, and digital feminism investigates the ways in which digital technology can either bolster or weaken feminist movements, online spaces' potential to maintain or dismantle gender inequality, and more. Thus, Cyberfeminism creates spaces for woman to voice the silenced communities easier, faster and with expanding freedom. Having mentioned types of Feminism, paragraphs below will inform about the rationale of Feminist Theory and its core concepts.

4. Feminist Theory

A well-known Feminist theorist, Butler (1990) claims that feminist theories address women's societal positions, histories, encounters, beliefs, and aspirations in order to honor women's lives and reveal the gender inequality in the community. Butler (1993) contends that gender is created through the behaviors we partake on a daily basis, implying that gender is anything we both reenact and produce. Furthermore, Butler (1990, 1993) believes that individuals can only be deemed gendered if they act in ways that corroborate both the concepts of masculinity and femininity. In the ensuing paragraphs, the two concepts of gender inequalities and patriarchy (Collins & Bilge, 2016; Nentwich & Kellan, 2014) that lie at the kernel of Feminist Theory will be delivered.

5. Gender

In education, the terms of *sex* and *gender* are employed alternately; nevertheless, *sex* implies biological variations between girls and boys, whereas *gender* is generated by society and represents attributes that correspond to male or female identities. Indeed, both girls and boys range in the manner in which they align with portrayed masculine and feminine features. Many educators are intrigued by sex differences; yet, however, sex is a dichotomous construct, which hinders the possibility for scholars to investigate and cherish the intricacies of gender (McGeown & Warhurst, 2020). In brief, we are born with a specific sex (except medical anomalies), either female or male; but, during the socialization process, we develop a gender

identity. Wood (2015) remarks that gender shapes our assumptions, demands, and inspections of women and men, along with positions, advantages, and socioeconomic conditions that women and men encounter. Hall et al. (2007) challenges us to ponder about the ways in which men's and women's employment are shaped by society; they examine the ways in which distinct kinds of professions are classified or gendered as either masculine or feminine.

6. Patriarchy

Patriarchy is an organizational structure that predominantly conveys the positions, experiences, opinions, and wants of men in mass. Feminist scholars highlight that White, apparently male individual, organized numerous cultures, particularly those of the West, at onset. The people in question employed their own experiences, wants, values, choices, pursuits, and ideologies to dictate how social life was regulated. It is noteworthy that Feminist theorists do not posit those men intentionally structured society to silence women and marginalized groups. Patriarchy embraces not only the supremacy of men but also the ingestion and maintenance of authoritarian notions in social relationships by everybody, irrespective of gender (Collins & Bilge, 2016). The premise is that when Western societies constructed, White men occupied seats in power and women did not. Consequently, the structures of our society are insufficiently reflecting the lives, demands, values, preferences, passions and opinions held by women and minorities (Gilligan & Snider, 2018; Hall et al., 2007; Wood, 2015).

Patriarchy is also an ideology that has its roots deeply in gender binaries and hierarchies. Male dominance (the dominant group) and female subordination (the oppressed group) are inherently perpetuated in a culture of patriarchy. It prioritizes masculinity over femininity and "elevates some men over other men and all men over women" (Gilligan & Snider, 2018, p. 6). As a closely connected term, as stated by Storey (2021), it is possible to use the term hegemony in reference to a society in which, regardless of the existence of inequality, there is a substantial amount of unanimity, allowing those from marginalized social categories and strata to endorse and associate with the political, cultural, and ideological forms that adhere to the dominant structures of control or authority. Gender stereotypes established by a patriarchal culture depict women as a lower status, under the tutelage of the dominant gender (men). Although rarely occurs, women in the dominant group may exploit their racial privilege to perpetuate patriarchal power structures for their own gain over minority women such as immigrants or ethnic minority group (Qin, 2004).

7. Critical Theory

The Feminist Theory studies issues of power, patriarchy, and gender inequality, as the previous paragraphs addressed at length. Critical Theory studies gender inequality by identifying "prevailing structures and practices that create or uphold disadvantage, inequity, or oppression" (Baxter & Braithwaite, 2008, p. 290). Some prominent studies and representatives of Critical Theory are Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno (2002), Jurgen Habermas (1987) and Douglas Kellner (1989).

Transformative potency is the ultimate objective of Critical Theory. Specifically, it adopts a multidisciplinary strategy that aspires to negotiate between tailored empirical disciplines and bridge the gap between the forms of philosophical inquiry essential to comprehend the bigger picture of history and the study of empirical evidence. Beyond simply outlining social reality, Critical Theory aims to shed light on the predominant forces that operate in society so as to take precautions, and change can be sparked (Agger, 1991; Carter et al., 2012; Wood, 2015).

An analysis of the formal and informal systems employed by dominant groups to prioritize their desires and regulate societies in a manner that favors their objectives is of particular appeal to Critical Theorists. At the same time, Critical Theorists strive to comprehend how oppressed parties gain power and how to alter prevailing patterns and, potentially, the ideologies that underpin them. This enables critics of Critical Theory to focus on not only formal macro systems of legitimacy like laws but also micro systems like "tiny, every day, physical" deeds that perpetuate specific ideologies and the disparities they entail (Foucault, 1984, p. 211).

Positivism as a paradigm has also been challenged by Critical Theory both at the level of everyday conduct and within social theories that distill the social realm down to causative and effect associations. Positivism fulfills an ideological agenda where it nurtures fatalism and apathy. In juxtaposition with post-positivist views, critical theories place an immense value on societal transformation that is, reforming the way cultures operate and the tangible and ethereal repercussions they have on individuals (Wood, 2015). Consequently, a substantial portion of aristocratic social science is severely derided by the Frankfurt School for missing the form of philosophical creativity that enables social scientists to discern emerging social facts such as racism, the end of upper-class, patriarchy, and the supremacy of nature, instead of focusing on merely the readily apparent social facts as they appear (Agger, 1991).

8. Critical Feminist Theory

We attempted to enlighten the readers about the scopes, aims, and peculiarities of Critical Theory and Feminist Theory in the previously provided paragraphs. In a nutshell, Feminist Theory scrutinizes gender inequality and patriarchy (Collins & Bilge, 2016), whereas Critical Theory facilitates the inspection of gender disparity by recognizing dominant structures and practices that perpetuate drawbacks injustice, or tyranny (Baxter & Braithwaite, 2008). The Critical Feminist Theory (CFT) that underpins our work is an integration of Feminist Theory and Critical Theory. Critical Feminist Theory, from a Feministic and Critical Theoretical standpoint, has a direct connection to gender, race-related, and financial disparities that impede constructive social development and may influence educational settings as well that is worth discussing.

Feminist Critical Theories (FCT) or CFT are distinguished from other analyses by their particular focus on gender equality and the notion that gender equality cannot be attained under extant doctrinal and regulatory structures (Rhode, 1990). According to Lafrance and Wigginton (2019), CFT arose in psychology as an opposition to androcentric studies that stigmatized women for their dearth of moral maturity and hence unsuitability for positions of authority; these studies, in turn, contributed to the maintenance of gender inequality and the marginalization of women .

CFTs aim to identify and challenge gender-related injustice, sexism, loss of value, and alienation based on the fundamental presumptions noted above. CFTs address power dynamics and matters like women's disparate status and privilege compared to males. Hochschild and Machung (2003) defined the second shift as women's household chores, food preparation, and caring for children following working. Although most heterosexual families have two income earners, women still conduct most of the housework and care for youngsters, parents, and various other relatives (Jephcott, et al., 2023; Yücel & Chung, 2023). To put it succinctly, dialogical interaction with marginalized social groups with the goal of their inclusion constitutes the central point of the political agenda of CFT. This vital insight is a vital feminist contribution to academic inquiry and Critical Social Theory.

Critical Feminist Scholars typically do not identify tailored Feminist methodologies; however, their research frequently concentrates on facets of life that have been overlooked or insufficiently addressed in conventional studies, with the objective of tackling overarching issues pertaining to social justice (Rhode, 1990; Wood, 2015). Fundamentally, CFT offers a

paradigm for perceiving how power dynamics in social structures, such as educational institutions, justify patriarchy with the supremacy of men and solicits for us to constantly examine social frameworks which threaten gender justice and equality. Thus, in juxtaposition with Liberal Feminism, Critical Feminism addresses the longstanding roots of sexism and theorizes the means by which patriarchy perpetually recreates itself throughout millennia. CFT investigates how privilege and power are bestowed or confiscated, uncovers sexism and disparities between genders, and centers research on women (Andersen, 2021; Bucholtz, 2014; Stevens & Martell, 2019).

CFT is characterized as a strand of thought within the feminist movement that exposes the interrelation between the patriarchal system and capitalism, which are perceived as interlinked hegemonic entities. From a standpoint of politics, Critical Feminism seeks to liberate women from conjugal violence and conflict with the expanding influence of capitalism and multinational enterprises. Critical Feminists address how women and men's daily lives develop, perpetuate, and reform gender ideology. CFT seeks to relieve, emancipate, and empower the downtrodden through inquiry into an interrelated, multi-parametric system in social interactions (Dadds, 2011; Gale de Saxe, 2016; Katsiampoura, 2024).

9. Critical Feminist Theory and English Language Teaching

Critical feminism advocates for a reevaluation of prevailing concepts of knowledge, power, and methods of uplifting the marginalized. It is also pertinent to acknowledge critical feminism's role in the debate about education in general as a tool for resistance and the emancipation of the oppressed, since this theory acknowledges the role of gender, race, and class in shaping the dominant discourse in education (Bhandar, 2000; Katsiampoura, 2024). A significant and developing field of research is the nexus between CFT and ELT in specific field of study. This field addresses the insertion of feminist positions, structures of power, and gender-related issues into teaching languages.

In ELT, the researchers, Preservice Teachers, Inservice teachers and lecturers might benefit from CFT and its related concepts such as; delving into how language shapes and questions gender societal expectations, fostering pedagogical approaches and terminology that are inclusive of both genders, combating sexism in educational programs for languages, dealing with uneven power dynamics in the classroom, embracing a range of perspectives and life experiences into language teaching programs that illustrates cultural traces of power imbalances.

Through a broader perspective, CFT might serve on many sources from material design, curricula, feminist pedagogies to material design in ELT. The employment of CFT in ELT is versatile. For classroom management, using intersectional techniques to comprehend and resolve disparities in language classrooms. Incorporating CFT to build feminist pedagogies that are unique to language learning and teaching. Use of CFT to take a critical stance on the evaluation and design of ELT materials by searching the portrayal of gender in these contexts can aid developing critical lens on ELT material design and evaluation. Analyzing the diverse cultural contexts in which language acquisition interacts with gender identities and power dynamics through CFT may help to develop deeper understanding to alleviate gender binary problems.

Through the cultivation of integrity, diversity, and critical awareness, CFT has a considerable impact on language curriculum design as well. Intersectionality emphasizes how crucial it is for curriculum designers to take into account a variety of intersecting identities, including those related to ability, sexual orientation, and racism. Through intersectionality, ELT curriculum may ensure concern to address each student's unique and diverse experiences rather than considering gender as a stand-alone category.

To boost inclusivity, CFT argues in favor of including underrepresented voices and perspectives, making sure that the curriculum encompasses a variety of identities and experiences. This may promote an inclusive learning atmosphere where all students experience a sense of belonging and value.

CFT places a strong emphasis on the value of critical pedagogy, which challenges and invites language learners to consider and analyze society norms and hierarchies of power. Incorporating this strategy into the classroom may to a great extent urge learners to think critically and take an active role in their own education.

One of the main tenets of CFT is the need to confront long-established gender norms and stereotypes in written and spoken language. CFT advocates for the dismantling of sexist language and its established gender norms. This might result in the inclusion of gender representations that are diverse and devoid of stereotypes in textbooks and other language materials.

Language programs that prioritize CFT and practice can better equip their students to effect social change via the medium of language. Recognizing and resisting harmful language practices and educating language learners to advocate for themselves and others may be a part of this effort.

10. Tips to Prioritize CFT for Language Instructors

- Setting a good example by using inclusive language yourself and encouraging your learners to do the same. One way to do this is to use non-gendered language and refrain from making assumptions based on gender.
- Inspiring learners and giving them examples of people who defy gender stereotypes.
- Fostering an atmosphere of support via establishing a learning space in which each student is acknowledged and valued. Quickly and efficiently handle any cases of harassment or discrimination based on gender.
- Encouraging conversations that question and dismantle preconceived notions about gender. Make sure your learners are thinking critically about gender representation in all forms of media, from ELT books to everyday encounters.
- Incorporating the experiences and perspectives of underrepresented groups into the lessons you prepare, notably women's and other marginalized individual's.
- Permitting your learners to consider how their personal prejudices and ideas shape their worldview. Journaling, discussion groups, or self-evaluation practices are excellent ways to accomplish reflective thinking.
- Building a welcoming and safe educational atmosphere for all students through advocating group projects and collaborative learning that recognizes and appreciates the unique contributions of each student.

11. Conclusion

In classical mythology, Janus, the Roman deity of beginnings and transitions, is famously depicted with two faces: One directed toward the future and the other reflecting on the past (Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2014). This duality aptly mirrors the evolution of Critical Feminist Theory (CFT) and its growing significance in the field of English Language Teaching (ELT), which this study has thoroughly explored. The intersection of gender studies, Critical Feminism, and ELT has catalyzed a rich body of scholarship on themes such as the representation of gender in educational materials, the use of feminist and queer pedagogies, and the analysis of intersectionality and gendered discourse in language instruction (López-Medina, 2023; Page, 2016). However, within the Turkish EFL context, research on integrating CFT remains notably sparse (Bağ & Bayyurt, 2015; Gün & Topkaya, 2023; Ordem & Ulum, 2020).

This paper aimed to address this gap, advocating for a more robust engagement with CFT in Turkish EFL academia, pedagogy and research and calls for further investigation into how CFT can enrich ELT in Turkish context.

Our critical review of existing literature highlighted persistent biases, particularly in the prioritization of male identities, the pervasive use of gendered pronouns and representations and gendered language. These issues, evident even in aforementioned research addressing gender, call for a deeper examination of gendered binaries in academic discourse. This opens pathways for future research to explore how gendered language disproportionately influences language anxiety, particularly among women, or how inclusive practices through CFT can mitigate such barriers. As Holman et al. (2018) emphasized, systemic gender disparities are unlikely to resolve without deliberate reforms in education, policy, and academic publishing. CFT offers the potential to challenge these entrenched inequalities by fostering inclusivity, amplifying marginalized voices, and advocating for equitable educational practices. CFT, therefore, offers a transformative lens to address these disparities, fostering inclusivity and promoting a balanced discourse that values all voices and voicing the silenced on both genders. We believe that with the lens of CFT, women and men will not compete with each other rather will complete, support and value each other in all spheres of life including education.

While some strands of Feminist Theories, highlighted in the previous parts, have faced criticism, such as neglecting racial dynamics, rejecting traditional family structures and domestic life, or fostering antagonism between genders, this study champions a version of CFT that envisions collaboration rather than competition between men and women. By emphasizing intersectionality and inclusivity, CFT envisions a framework where language education becomes a tool for fostering mutual respect and shared understanding for EFL educators, teachers and preservice teachers. Through critical discourse of CFT in ELT, educators can advance a vision of equality and respect, using language as a tool not just for effective communication but for cultivating a critical, balanced, and socially aware worldview.

This study emphasized the need for a more nuanced and critical approach to curriculum design, classroom dynamics, and material development in ELT. CFT has the potential to transform classrooms into spaces that go beyond linguistic proficiency to foster social justice and equity. By challenging existing hierarchies and integrating CFT principles into ELT, educators can create pedagogies that empower learners to critically engage with issues of gender, race, and class, ultimately reshaping education into a vehicle for meaningful social change. Lecturers can

employ CFT to critique and improve ELT curricula, design inclusive classroom materials, and promote Critical and Feminist Pedagogies that challenge stereotypes. Examples include analyzing how cultural norms embedded in ELT textbooks perpetuate gender hierarchies or incorporating digital tools that empower marginalized learners, particularly in regions with patriarchies or restrictive social norms

In conclusion, the synthesis and adoption of CFT in ELT represents a pivotal step toward redefining education as a platform for societal transformation. Language teaching is not merely a technical practice but an inherently ideological process, reflecting and shaping societal power dynamics. By fostering critical consciousness and challenging systemic inequalities, CFT equips both educators and learners to navigate linguistic, cultural, and social landscapes with empathy and agency. As such, it paves the way for a more inclusive, respectful, and balanced approach to education, one that holds the promise of reshaping not only classrooms but also the societies they reflect. . This study aligns with broader efforts to address global inequalities and encourage learners to become agents of change via education.

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