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Critical pedagogy and critical theory of technology in English language teaching: views from Turkey / E. Ordem (pp. 750-763)

45-Critical pedagogy and critical theory of technology in English language teaching: views from Turkey

Eser ORDEM[1]

Abstract

Studies on critical pedagogy and technology have been on the rise in recent decades. However, bringing critical pedagogy and critical theory of technology together has been hardly studied in English language teaching (ELT) and English as a second language (ESL). This study aims to enable the researcher and learners to compare two different technologies by using participatory action research (PAR). The participants (*n*=35) were given two data collection tools composed of a questionnaire and semi-structured interview form. The researcher and the learners collaborated with each other in each stage of the online syllabus preparation. The findings show that the learners developed negative attitudes towards the non-interactive Versant English Test (VET) and the online platform provided by the textbook publishers. However, the learners developed positive attitudes towards the use of the interactive online Google discussion platform where they were able to debate sociopolitical issues within the framework of critical pedagogy. In addition, the findings also imply that familiarizing learners with critical pedagogy and critical theory of technology can endorse authenticity, agency, reflection, action and praxis via online platforms.

Keywords: Critical pedagogy, critical theory of technology, second language teaching, participatory action research

İngilizce öğretiminde eleştirel pedagoji ve eleştirel teknoloji kuramı

Öz

Eleştirel pedagoji ve teknoloji üzerine yapılan çalışmalar son yıllarda artış göstermektedir. Bununla birlikte, eleştirel pedagoji ve eleştirel teknoloji teorisini bir araya getirmek, İngilizce öğretiminde (ELT) ve ikinci dil olarak İngilizce'de (ESL) neredeyse hiç çalışılmamıştır. Bu çalışma, katılımcı eylem araştırması (KEA) kullanarak araştırmacı ve öğrencilerin iki farklı teknolojiyi karşılaştırmalarını sağlamayı amaçlamaktadır. Katılımcılara (n = 35) bir anket ve yarı yapılandırılmış görüşme formundan oluşan iki veri toplama aracı verildi. Araştırmacı ve öğrenciler, çevrimiçi müfredat hazırlığının her aşamasında birbirleriyle işbirliği yaptılar. Bulgular, öğrencilerin etkileşimli olmayan Versant İngilizce Testine (VET) ve ders kitabı yayıncıları tarafından sağlanan çevrimiçi platforma karşı olumsuz tutumlar geliştirdiklerini göstermektedir. Bununla birlikte, öğrenciler, sosyopolitik konuları eleştirel pedagoji çerçevesinde tartışabildikleri etkileşimli çevrimiçi Google tartışma platformunun kullanımına karşı olumlu tutumlar geliştirdiler. Ek olarak, bulgular, öğrenenlere eleştirel pedagoji ve eleştirel teknoloji kuramının tanıtılmasının çevrimiçi platformlar aracılığıyla özgün düşünebilmelerin, aktif olmalarını, eleştirel düşünebileceklerini, eylem ve pratiği destekleyebileceğini de göstermektedir.

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Anahtar kelimeler: Eleştirel pedagoji, eleştirek teknoloji kuramı, ikinci dil öğretimi, katılımcı eylem araştırması

Introduction

Critical pedagogy aims to create social changes in societies by opposing neoliberal policies that allow little room for resistance (Giroux, 2010). Nations that adopt these market-based policies may force learners to use certain technologies that hinder social dialogue and harden collaboration (Olssen & Peters, 2005; Price, 2014). Therefore, educational policies may tend to exclude students even if they use technology. In order to deconstruct the content of these policies, critical pedagogical perspective towards the use of technology can help students and teachers collaborate with each other in an inclusive manner.

Although there are a number of key terms in critical pedagogy, dialogical communication, dialectal thinking, praxis and problem-posing constitute the backbone of critical pedagogy (Freire, 2000). Dialogical communication refers to an epistemological relationship and the process of learning and knowing each other. An individual that adopts dialogic communication is regarded as critical in that power relations are criticized and deconstructed. For Freire (2000), dialectal thinking denotes relational aspects and internal relations rather than merely dichomotic relations based on external relations. Another critical term is praxis related to reflection and action because reflection without action may be insufficient to lead to praxis. Problem-posing also refers to dialogue, listening and action by problematizing oppressive education and topics on the agenda. Thus, learners and teachers are placed on a continuum rather a contradictory scale or dichotomy. Freire (2000) defines problem-posing as follows:

> Problem-posing education, as a humanist and liberating praxis, posits as fundamental that the people subjected to domination must fight for their emancipation. To that end, it enables teachers and students to become Subjects of the educational process by overcoming authoritarianism and an alienating intellectualism; it also enables people to overcome their false perception of reality. The world—no longer something to be described with deceptive words—becomes the object of that transforming action by men and women which results in their humanization. (p.86)

Teacher-student dichotomy is deconstructed to make room for authentic dialogic communication and to encourage dialectical thinking. Reflection and action are expected to lead to praxis. However, the key concepts in Freire (2000) do not proceed in a linear manner because of the nature of dialogic and dialectal thinking. What is intended in critical pedagogy is to find or establish places for opposition and resistance to capitalistic and neoliberal aims because neoliberalism constantly aims to maximize profits of large corporations by endorsing autonomy and freedom (Harvey, 2007). However, in neoliberalism, individuals are made into economically, politically and social weak individuals. Thus, researchers in the movement of critical pedagogy (Au & Apple, 2009; Freire, 2000; Giroux, 2010, 2020; Mclaren, 2016; Suarez, 2004) intend to find new educational perspectives such as critical pedagogy to empower learners and teachers as intellectuals. This tension between critical pedagogy and neoliberalism can be vividly seen in ESL settings.

Critical pedagogy in second language teaching

Although critical pedagogy has been emphasized in the last three decades, transformative changes in English language teaching curriculum have been hardly changed in countries where English is taught as a primary second language (Pennycook, 1990, 2002) because neoliberalism has dominated English

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language teaching (ELT) and English taught as a second language (ESL). Pennycook (2002) emphasizes that ELT emerged in non-English speaking countries, and therefore ESL has been disconnected from the colonial and genocidal history of the British.

In the neocolonial and neoliberal era, both ESL and ELT have been slow in adopting critical pedagogy because emancipation from market-based ideology and textbooks remains the main principle of critical pedagogy. Critical discourse analysis and critical pedagogy have been productive and theoretically discussed in ESL (Fairclough, 1992). However, the practical applications of critical pedagogy have been largely insufficient because neoliberal policies have been dominant in ESL and ELT spheres (Phillipson, 1992; Pennycook, 2017). Phillipson (2017) emphasizes that the British Council has been one of the agencies that has hindered the emergence of critical perspectives. Piller and Cho (2013) focus on the problem of neoliberal policies that shape the course of English language learning and teaching. The content of syllabi and curricula is molded and determined by neoliberal global textbook publishers and the agencies such as the British Council and the World Bank because critical pedagogy entails opposing capitalistic aims and deconstructing neoliberal ideas by empowering learners and teachers. Therefore, little room is reserved for critical pedagogy in neoliberalism-based ESL education.

Critical theory of technology in second language teaching

The use of critical pedagogy through technology has been rarely addressed in second language teaching because the curriculum in ELT has provided little room for critical pedagogy. Critical theory of technology develops a critical perspective towards the use of technology because technology is not perceived as neutral, natural and un-ideological on an economic and political level (Feenberg, 2009; Marfim & Pesce, 2019; Warschauer, 2003). Technology in ESL is used to follow students' learning curve to manipulate them because the dominance and domination of English are reinforced through technology. However, technology can also be used to develop critical views towards the topics in ESL. Carroll-Miranda (2011) perceives these technologies as emancipatory technologies. Gomez (2009) mentions the ethics of technology based on critical pedagogical perspective by emphasizing that dialogue, attention and face-to-face communication in the virtual world can be emancipatory elements. Köksal and Ulum (2018) criticize the technologies used in the setting of ESL since the testing system operated via artificial intelligence (AI) leads to negative views in the learners. Thus, they emphasize that human agency and feedback are essential to endorse learners' learning a second language.

Feenberg (2009) stresses the fact that technology is not pure and innocent. Technology is used in specific social contexts to serve special needs. Neoliberal policies are constantly reinforced through technology because learners in ESL are forced to purchase global English textbooks to access online platforms that dictate certain tasks and activities on learners. Feenberg (2009) calls these processes and practices as the use of technical codes. Unless textbooks are purchased, learners are punished and are not allowed to access online learning systems without textbook codes that are defined as technical codes within a broader context. In addition, in Turkey, learners' grades are decreased if they refuse to purchase these global English textbooks. Thus, neoliberal policies and technology together gain power to govern learners' identities, minds and bodies. However, critical pedagogy and critical theory of technology are hardly mentioned in ESL curriculum and syllabus. Learners' bodies are lined up to conform to the rules imposed by those in power in ESL settings.

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This study aims to use participatory action research by involving the researcher and upper-intermediate second language learners in the use of technology so as to raise awareness of critical pedagogy and critical theory of technology. Since the learners are generally expected to follow merely some online procedures mandated by their ESL teachers, they are rarely given the chance to negotiate and criticize the content of the curriculum and syllabus. Therefore, this study intends to use an online discussion platform to enable the learners to pose problems and discuss unspeakable topics through an online discussion platform.

Method

In line with the framework of critical pedagogy, this study uses the method of participatory action research (PAR) based on the paradigm of critical theory and knowledge. Research, reflection and action in education constitute the chief constructs of PAR that involves liberation of learners and teachers from oppression in school settings because learners and teachers are often confronted with repressive mechanisms in schools that act as Ideological State Apparatus (ISA) (Althusser, 1971). These oppressive political, social and educational structures can be criticized and transformed through PAR and critical pedagogy. Therefore, both of them can be endorsed through critical theory of technology. PAR supports researchers, teachers and learners in that they can negotiate topics in groups through dialogical communication and dialectal thinking based on reflection and action (Bertrand, 2016). Thus, PAR provides a broad platform for agents of learning to collaborate and interact with each other so as to produce changes in their own school environment. Power relations, exclusionary practices and oppressive mechanisms are criticized to reach praxis and to emancipate themselves from repression (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2005; Park, 2001). Group discussion is strongly encouraged to address topics on the agenda.

This study was carried out because technology in the university was used to govern and audit the learners to support the marketization of global English textbooks through technical codes. Thus, the technology in our setting was not used to promote group discussions or develop the use of critical pedagogy. The content of curriculum was strictly determined by using the technology. This technology required the learners to complete the online tasks assigned to them by their instructors. Each task was timed and monitored by the instructors. In addition, the learners were asked to take an online Versant English exam at the beginning and end of the year to pass the class. The learners were also exposed to online tasks and exams throughout the year. The overall online learning system appeared as follows.
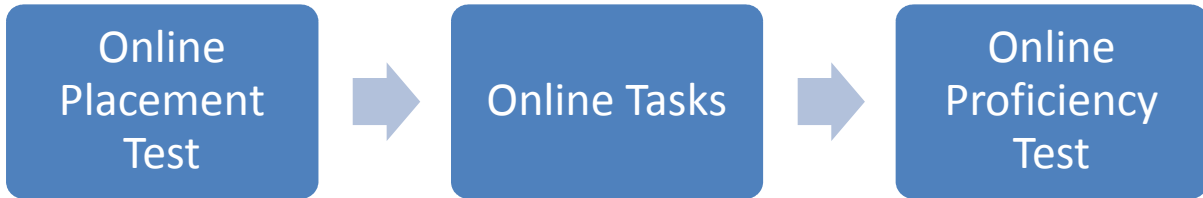

Figure 1. The yearlong online process in ESL setting

The whole year was supported through standard online tasks and exams. However, what was lacking in this system was that the learners had no chance of giving feedback or changing the system through dialogic communication. Thus, the technology used was used in a linear and one directional way without including any bidirectional feedback system. Group discussions with each other and the

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teachers were unlikely, which prevented the emergence of critical pedagogy, individuals' critical reflection and action.

The problems mentioned above led the researcher to investigate how critical pedagogy could be used through technology. Therefore, in accordance with the tenets of critical pedagogy, PAR was selected as a method that would allow the learners and researcher to utilize technology in a wider context. Online discussion forums were thought to contribute to the development of critical pedagogy and to create social changes in the immediate school environment. Thus, dialogical communication, dialectal thinking, problem-posing and praxis were used as the main elements. A questionnaire composed of 27 items subsuming seven categories were given to the participants. The questionnaire was obtained and adapted from different studies (Daniel, Schumacher, Stelter & Riley, 2016); Shacar & Neumann, 2010; Rothman, Romeo, Brennan, & Mitchell, 2011)

Table 1. Domains of online learning and courses

Domains	Domain item and description	Items
Domain 1	Reasons participants identified led them to be in the online discussion platform	1-6
Domain 2	Perceived appropriateness of course readings and assignments.	7-10
Domain 3	Accessibility of technology required to complete coursework	11-12
Domain 4	Student perception of researcher feedback and communication	13-15
Domain 5	Course organization/format meeting expectations for undergraduate level course	16-19
Domain 6	Student perception of achievement of intended outcomes in courses.	20-23
Domain 7	Effectiveness of assignments leading to collaborative/critical work in the courses	24-27

The domains were identified in accordance with online instructional paradigms and online courses format developed by Shacar and Neumann (2010) and Rothman, Romeo, Brennan, & Mitchell (2011). In addition to the questionnaire, a focus-group interview was made with 12 participants by asking a few questions so that they could critically reflect upon what technology they were using, what they thought about the online exams conducted through VET and about the technology used to guide them to discuss different sociopolitical issues. Thus, these questions enabled them to compare the school's non-interactive technology including the online exam and the technology online Google discussion platform.

Research context and participants

The study was performed in a newly-established public university in the mid-south of Turkey. The academic major was the department of translation and interpreting whose curriculum was not prepared including the students. Rather, the content of the curriculum was formed only by the lecturers. In addition, this department was dependent on the school of foreign languages where the curriculum was constituted based on the content of the global English textbooks. Both the learners and instructors were asked to strictly follow the curriculum with the support of the technology. Thus, an overwhelming surveillance system was installed to observe each subject in the system in a minute-to-minute manner.

The participants of the study were the researcher and 35 undergraduates who were spending their first year in the preparatory program to improve their English at an advanced level. Each learner was asked to take an online placement and proficiency test through the Versant English Test supported by

Pearson. In addition, each learner was made to purchase the textbooks to access online tasks assigned to them by the instructors. However, the researcher and the students in this study agreed to refuse to use this online system. Instead, the researcher collaborated with the students and opted to utilize other online discussion forums and platforms to enable the learners to create a change throughout the fall and spring semesters.

Procedure

This study purported to utilize online discussion platform to enable the researcher and the learners to pose problems regarding the use of the current technology that measured the learners' language levels and assigned them online tasks. The study was composed of four stages. In the first stage, the researcher introduced critical pedagogy (Freire, 2000) and critical theory of technology developed by Feenberg (2009). In addition, they were shown some interactive online courses that helped the learners discuss the content of the curriculum. In this stage, a course that lasted six weeks on coursera, an online learning platform that serves people across the globe was introduced to the participants. As a warm-up activity, the lessons taught by Paul Bloom were used as a warm-up activity that involved intensive online discussion. In addition to the coursera online learning platform, a few TED talks ranging from 3 minutes to 20 minutes were selected and discussed. Another warm activity was a BBC Hard Talk program that people could access online. The reason for the selection of this program was that Hard Talk contained critical and political topics that were thought-provoking and challenging. In the second stage, the researcher presented information about how the study would proceed in the following 14 weeks in the spring term. They were shown how to use online google group discussion platform and Mendeley, an optional program that allows individuals to read texts on their phones or computers. In the third stage, the learners were asked to critically reflect on the current technology that they used up to then. In addition, they were requested to browse the topics in the curriculum in accordance with the content of the textbook curriculum. They were told to focus on the excluded topics from these textbooks, to think about the socio-political issues on the agenda at global and local (national) level and to make a list of 12 topics to discuss. The researcher and the learners spent two weeks to come up with the list and did some preliminary research about the topics chosen. In the classroom setting where each group was composed of five members, the reasons for the selection of these topics were justified in group discussions.

Table 2. Selected global and local sociopolitical topics for a critical syllabus

Global topics	Local topics
Racism	Inequality in education
Slavery/Colonialism	Refugees and immigrants
Destruction of nature	Minority rights and lives
Islam in Europe	LGBT and queer rights
War and terror	Child labor
Neoliberalism and poverty	Violence against women

The topics were chosen by doing online search and then brainstorming activities. Since they were informed about the nature of critical pedagogy that deals with socio-political issues, the learners and the researcher also selected these kinds of topics that were totally excluded from the default and pre-determined curriculum.

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In the fourth stage, the researcher introduced the Versant English Test conducted by Pearson through Artificial Intelligence that automatically presented the written and oral results within an hour. In addition, the learners were told that they were also using Pearson English textbooks so that they could understand the neoliberal aims behind the use of this technological device and the textbooks. In the fifth stage, they were asked to comment on the use of online Google group discussion platform and the Versant English Test to be able to create a social change in their school environment. Thus, the syllabus was prepared by the learners and researcher. The stages and the duration that were to be followed were determined together. In line with the conceptual framework of PAR, the researcher was involved in each stage of the syllabus and action throughout the term and did not distance himself from the learners. A descriptive overview of the stages is given in Table 2.

Table 3. A descriptive overview of stages and procedures for a critical syllabus

Stages	Categorization	Content	Duration
1	Informing	Introduction of critical pedagogy	1 week
2	Ethical issues	Respect, value and empathy	1 week
3	First warm-up	Online coursera	1 week
4	Second warm-up	Debate examples online	1 week
5	Practice	Online google discussion platform	2 weeks
6	Research	Online research into global/local context	2 weeks
7	Debate	Debate via online discussion platform	5 weeks
8	Reflection	Critical reflection and feedback	1 week

In the first four weeks, face-face communication was provided in the physical classroom setting to familiarize the learners with how to deal with online Google discussion platform by using the tenets of critical pedagogy. We aimed to carry critical pedagogy onto online platforms because this system also allowed the learners to discuss what they were unable to do orally or discuss in front of the crowd because of social anxiety or political oppression. Thus, I believe that online platforms can help learners feel more comfortable discussing socio-political issues. In the remaining weeks, the whole process was perpetuated online.

Findings

This section analyzes both the quantitative and qualitative results. Each item was based on a three-response scale composed of Agree (A), Neutral (N) and Disagree (DA). The mean score was calculated and given in Table 4. The overall findings of the study show that the learners developed a negative attitude towards VET exam because of its lack of interactive dimension. In addition, the learners in general had positive attitudes towards the use of the interactive online google discussion platform. The findings also imply that the learners had the chance to make comparisons between the uses of two different technologies. The first technological tool that they used was non-interactive and did not allow them to discuss or change the topics that they could select.

Table 4. Results of online google discussion platform questionnaire

No	Items	A %	N %	DA %
1.	I like asynchronous classes because I am an independent learner.	70	10	20
2.	I find it easy to express my thoughts in writing in the online format.	75	13	12
3.	Asynchronous learning gives me extra time to think.	80	12	8

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4.	I like the extra time the online format gives me to think about the content of course materials	85	8	7
5.	Online discussion platform provides more flexible time.	78	14	8
6.	The asynchronous format allows me to complete work flexibly.	72	14	14
7.	Course materials made me critically think.	90	4	6
8.	Course readings challenged me to examine how I interact with my school friends.	80	10	10
9.	Course readings led me to change how I interact with my school friends.	75	15	10
10.	The collaborative work helped me create new ideas and think more critically about ways to create social changes in my school setting.	90	4	6
11.	The technology tool was easily accessible.	90	8	2
12.	The online google discussion platform was easy to use.	94	4	2
13.	Researcher availability met my educational needs.	85	10	5
14.	Researcher feedback was timely and informative.	82	8	10
15.	Researcher was accepting of student's opinions.	82	12	6
16.	The syllabus was well organized with student participation	88	10	2
17.	This course was less rigorous than a face-to-face class	80	10	10
18.	The online course format helped me manage my time and pace myself to meet required deadlines.	75	15	10
19.	This online course was not as rigorous as a face-to-face class.	86	6	8
20.	Online activities were scaffolded well by the researcher and friends.	88	12	6
21.	The number of group assignments was determined together.	75	15	10
22.	The online readings helped me examine what I could do in this class.	86	10	4
23.	Course materials helped me examine my critical philosophical stances	80	10	10
24.	The group work gave me ideas that I can use to engage my own friends in collaborative work.	75	15	10
25.	The assignments challenged me to examine course content and clarify my ideas.	76	16	8
26.	The online work and discussion showed me ways to promote personal development in my school.	72	8	20
27.	The collaborative reflections helped me develop a critical perspective.	78	12	10

The results regarding the first domain show that more than 70 % of the respondents reported that asynchronous classes allowed them more extra and flexible time to think and complete the assignments that they selected with the researcher. In the second domain, the nature of the materials and assignments was asked and more than 75 % of the learners responded that the material that included socio-political issues helped them to think critically and to interact with their friends. The third domain asked about the type of the technology tool used. More than 90 % of the respondents had a positive attitude towards online discussion platform because of its accessibility and easy use. The quality of feedback loop and communication between the researcher and respondents in the fourth domain was appreciated by more than 80 % of them. More than 80 % of respondents' perception of online course organization and format in the fifth domain was positive because the 14-week syllabus was formed with the collaboration of the researcher and learners. The results of the sixth domain referring to the achievement of the outcomes show that the learners (75 % and more) reported that they were scaffolded by both the researcher and the learners. In the seventh domain emphasizing the role of group discussion, more than 70 % had favorable ideas because the group discussions helped them to develop critical skills and themselves.

The results indicate that most of the participants (70 % or more) found useful, efficient and effective the teaching of critical pedagogy through online Google discussion platforms because the syllabus was prepared by the researcher and learners that also selected six global and six local topics out of 50 topics in total. They had the chance to adjust themselves to the pacing of the course syllabus. In addition, all the learners were asked to criticize the standard curriculum mandated by the school that

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permitted little or no feedback loop or reciprocal discussion. 90 % of the respondents believed that collaborative work helped them develop a critical perspective so that they could have the chance to create a social change. By forming their syllabus and discussing global and local problems through online platform, a social change was made by refusing to study what was imposed on them. Therefore, 90 % of them found the materials thought-provoking and made them think critically. More than 80 % of them responded to each other about the topic discussed.

Findings related to the application of the non-interactive technology

Most of the participants in the interview reported that they had negative attitudes towards the use of non-interactive technological tools that were unable to allow the learners to give feedback to each other or discuss the topics that they could choose. There were two kinds of non-interactive technological tools. The first tool contained an online platform that mandated timed four-skill based tasks and did not provide an interactive opportunity. The second tool was the Versant English Exam (VET) operated by Artificial Intelligence that allowed no interaction between the learners, teachers and the system. In addition, the VET exam gave rise to a washback effect on the learners because the learners did not receive English education in accordance with the content of the exam. Therefore, most of them failed this exam. Thus, the non-interactive technological tools were criticized by the learners in that they made no room for the learners.

> I really felt that I was squeezed between two systems. I had to do the tense and modal activities. I did not want to do these mechanical things. I had to because I had to pass the exam. The proficiency exam was a disaster for me and my friends because we really couldn't understand it. We were all very very anxious about this technology. Even the teachers knew little about it. I do not understand why they forced themselves and us to use it. (P1)

> The first exam was shocking for me because we were jumped into it. Throughout the year we just followed their path. We did not receive any feedback. I think we did online activities for the sake of the curriculum and textbooks. We were always scared and disappointed. We knew that we would fail. This was our fear. The final exam was bad. I was also shocked at the end. The technology became my phobia. It was repetitive. The teachers did not trust us and themselves but they trusted the machines. This is not technology. I think they were totally misusing the technology. (P4)

The statements of the learners show that not all education-based technological tools are useful and efficient for learners. Rather, it demonstrates that some educational technological tools may lead to anxiety in learners because they feel that they have no control or power over technology. In addition, tasks and exams are mandated through technology without any human agents. However, critical pedagogy prioritizes subject agency and emancipation. The technological tool in the school was used to manipulate the learners' time, minds and learning curve through the technical codes without which the learners could not enter the class and would encounter an absolute failure. One of the participants emphasized that the misuse of the technology led to the phobia. Although the participants expressed their concern over the misuse of the technology, their ideas were not taken into consideration. The VET exam looked totally unfamiliar with the learners who did not believe that it was measuring their language skills. Although they objected to the application of the VET exam, the instructors and administrators told them that it was an obligation and a regulatory rule to take the VET exam. Thus, the loss of interaction through the technological tools and between the instructors and learners made second language learning more complicated.

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Findings related to the use of critical pedagogy through technology

The failure in the use of the standard non-interactive technological tools contributed to the use of another technological tool so that the learners could use their language skills through the online Google discussion platform where they could negotiate their ideas freely with the researcher and their friends. Most of the learners reported that the use of the new technological tool helped them to receive feedback and be involved in group discussions that affected their learning positively because the decision on the content of the syllabus was made by the learners and the researcher together. In addition, socio-political issues in the regular curriculum were never addressed. Only anodyne topics were chosen in accordance with the content of the global English textbooks. Thus, in both the curriculum and non-interactive online tasks, the learners were rarely equipped with the power to give feedback or negotiate meaning and topics that they would desire to discuss. However, the topics, materials and allocated time for each topic were chosen by the researcher and learners together so that they could all be involved in group discussions via the online platform.

> This is the first time in our school we have chosen the topics with the instructor. In Turkey, we cannot discuss sociopolitical issues easily. It is really hard to do this but we were able to discuss them. The online platform was easily accessible. We searched a lot and discussed a lot. I learned a lot. The exam was process and discussion based. I felt safer and more confident. From the beginning to the end, the process taught me a lot. (P6)

> I was not expecting such a listening and speaking course because the instructor did not impose anything on us. We guided the process. This online platform course was well-organized by us. We received feedback from each other and the instructor. This is important because in the other classes, we had no such a chance. We also discussed risky topics. It was online but we were not scared, although they were political. I think online platforms should allow us to discuss more. (P8)

The participants in general addressed the benefits of the online Google discussion platform where they could participate in group discussions by debating the topics that they selected. In addition, they had the chance of comparing the uses of two different technological tools. The participants also emphasized the efficient role of the process and discussion-based online course. The participants also took risks by discussing sociopolitical issues. However, since the researcher and the learners prepared the syllabus and selected the topics together, they learned to feel confident and secure in the first four weeks because the physical atmosphere and face-to-face communication gave them positive feelings about the pacing of the online course. The mutual trust between the researcher and them was established so that the risky sociopolitical issues could be discussed effectively.

Discussion

Gaining a critical perspective towards both technology and pedagogy was the main aim of this study because using any kind of technology was not tantamount to its efficiency or effectiveness. Therefore, it is important to explore the views of the learners on the use of technology used in the schools. In this present study, it was found that the learners were satisfied with neither the pedagogical curriculum nor the technological tool used. Therefore, a change in the use of the technological tool and the content of the curriculum was made by involving the learners in each stage. Koksal and Ulum (2018) are the first researchers that criticized the application of the VET because the learners developed a negative attitude towards the VET application. Koksal and Ulum arrived at the results regarding the use of the VET as follows.

> The results in the study imply that teachers have not been able to or have not been allowed to develop a critical perspective towards testing and Versant, although the learners have been

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> complaining about the nature, reliability and validity of the exam. The reliability problem was that the learners repeatedly emphasized that the same questions appeared in a row in the exam. Another reliability problem was that the learners, at the end, learned to copy and paste some paragraphs to obtain higher scores, which worked perfect for them. This reliability issue spread in the school immediately, which totally weakened the reliability of the exam. The learners have provided an infinite amount of constructive feedback about the exam, which have been ignored (p.48).

The VET exam has been exposed to criticisms by Chun (2008) who maintains that authenticity of the exam needs to be questioned because Chun (2008) emphasizes that technological expediency and impact should be interrogated in order to provide authentic interaction between test takers and test input. Authenticity of ESL exams has been discussed considerably so that learners could encounter authentic materials and conversations (Chun, 2006; Lewkowicz, 2000; Lumley & Brown, 1998; Ulum, 2020) Similarly, Downey et al. (2008) articulate that language tests might be constructed independent of their authentic contexts, which leads to decontextualization. Therefore, technical assessment of language skills is questioned well by Chun (2008).

> I never suggested that technology in assessment inevitably leads to commodification of the test taker, but rather it should be used in imaginative and creative ways to avoid the potentially dehumanizing effects it can cause. Because technology that could incorporate the assessment of the multidimensional and interactional aspects of language has yet to be developed, technology that does exist in facilitating convenient administration of assessment needs to be continually interrogated. In what ways will the design of test tasks become increasingly influenced and shaped by the expediency of technology that will appear in the future? (p.171)

Although some critical perspectives towards the use of technology in language assessment have been developed to help ESL learners interact authentically with AI-based technologies. In addition to the concerns over the VET application, the learners in this study also mentioned the use of online platform that asked them to do the online tasks assigned to them. However, their views in general were negative since they were unable to express their feedback and concerns on the platform. Pun (2013) stresses the fact that unless interaction is provided between teachers, learners and technology, efficiency cannot be obtained. Therefore, real time teaching, authentic interaction and the use of technology can be balanced in order to develop a positive attitude in ESL learners. It has been emphasized that technology alone cannot be an absolute solution to the problems in ESL learning (Kennedy & Don, 2013; Koksal, 2004; Pun, 2013). Zhen (2016) also addresses similar concerns in China by interpreting that English teachers should not blindly technology by ignoring the importance of feedback loop and authentic interaction that could allow both learners and teachers to discuss the problems regarding the use of the emerging technologies. Incecay and Kocoglu (2017) also show the positive and negative effect of how to use technology in a listening class and found that familiarizing the learners with the new technological tools and applications could produce better results. Therefore, these studies show that the feedback loop and productive discussion between learners and teachers can contribute to the learning environment significantly. Technology is emphasized to be useful, efficient and effective when learners are involved in the process and are asked to share their views and criticisms regarding the use of technology.

This study shows that the use of critical pedagogy via the discussion-based technological tool involved the learners in negotiating sociopolitical issues that they were unable to do in face-to-face communication because of the possible mislabeling and stigmatization concerns. In addition, those who had social anxiety in front of their friends were able to express their ideas more comfortably and freely through the online google discussion platform. I believe that it is critically important to use technological tools to support the establishment of critical pedagogy in online courses and content of curriculum. Gitlin and Ingerski (2018) mention technological possibilities for those who are

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marginalized and who are not given the opportunity to name the world. Boyd (2016) questions the use of critical pedagogy via new technologies because Boyd (2016) prioritizes human agency in technology.

> ...a tension exits between the tendency of technology to supersede the learning process and the creativity of teachers and learners to subvert the very environment designed to pacify and subordinate them. Like it or not, critical educators find themselves in a world largely defined and shaped by telecommunication technologies. The challenge in our time is to turn those technologies toward the pursuit of social and political liberation, so they can become the tool for empowering engaged citizens committed to creating a more equitable and just world in which to live, work, and learn. (p.182).

Bringing critical pedagogy and technology together can contribute to the discussion of sociopolitical issues in ESL in which regular curriculum does not allow learners and even teachers to negotiate risky topics. However, as long as human agency is empowered through constructive feedback and criticisms, critical pedagogy can be used effectively on online tools. In addition to critical pedagogy, critical theory of technology can also enable ESL practitioners and learners to develop critical perspectives towards technologies that they use. In this study, the participants developed the skill of criticizing the technological tools provided for them and realized that not all technological tools were effective for their learning. Boyd (2016) emphasizes the uniqueness and human agency in the use of technology because the idea of neoliberal enterprise and power relations can be deconstructed by supporting human agency, dialogic communication and dialectical thinking over technologies. Instead of creating a divide between physical face-to-face communication and digital communication, a broad continuum can be adopted by allowing ESL learners and practitioners to discuss sociopolitical issues, change their educational environment, transform curricular content and radicalize second language education through technology and human agency.

Conclusion and pedagogical recommendations

This study aimed to enable the learners to gain a critical perspective towards the use of technology in ESL by introducing them critical pedagogy and critical theory of education. The learners compared two different technological tools provided for them. While the standard technological tool and the VET exam supported by AI mandated the tasks beyond their power, the interactive technological tool enabled the researcher and learners to discuss sociopolitical issues at global and local level through the online Google discussion platform. The empowerment of the learners' agency allowed them to develop positive attitudes towards the technological tool that endorsed their group discussion. Thus, familiarizing learners with critical pedagogy and critical theory of technology can endorse authenticity, agency, reflection, action and praxis. In addition, neoliberal aims and power relations can be opposed and resisted. Thus, technological tools and online platforms can be places where resistance is possible.

In line with the paradigms of critical knowledge in pedagogy and technology, ESL learners should be allowed to provide feedback about technological tools that they are given so that their agency can be empowered. In addition, discussions between learners and teachers should be possible on the online tools and platforms. Before proceeding to using technological tools, learners can receive orientation training by showing them some examples such as Coursera, Ted Talk, Academic Earth and Hard Talk. Instead of using non-interactive technological tools imposed by school administrators and global textbook publishers, it is better to select technological tools that provide feedback loop for both learners and teachers. Instead of using obligatory technical codes to access online platforms endorsed by global textbook publishers, it is more plausible to choose online platforms where learners and teachers can establish social dialogue, negotiate meaning and provide constructive feedback.

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